

HEALTHY HOLISTIC BIBLICAL CONGREGATIONAL  
INFRASTRUCTURE CAN SUPPORT RESTORATION  
WHEN DEVASTATION IS EXPERIENCED

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
Dayton, Ohio  
May 2021

**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, OH**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HEALTHY HOLISTIC BIBLICAL CONGREGATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE CAN SUPPORT RESTORATION WHEN DEVASTATION IS EXPERIENCED**

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Jacques D. Denkins  
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#### **Mentors**

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Lisa Weah, DMin

My context is Blessed Hope Baptist Church located in Houston, Texas. This project seeks to address the lack of infrastructure in the church that leads to regression of progress. If the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions arise. This project will serve as a guide in providing biblical strategies, prayer, and a historical look at systemic structures to assist in restoration when tragedies and transitions occur. I discovered through the context of my ministry research that biblical infrastructure is essential to the restorative process for both the individual and the institution.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to begin by acknowledging the sovereignty of God in His infinite wisdom of bringing me into this world through two teenage parents that provided a great family support. My father's mother, Marion "Nana" McAfee White and my mother's father, H. L. Denkins, Sr. (PawPaw) and my mother's mother, Gracie Inez Richardson (Grandmother). I additionally have bonus grandparents Mr. William and Louise Law; this village of wisdom is affectionately known as the "pillars" in my life. I would not have made it through some major life pivots if they had not been God appointed during major life transitions. Another key member of my village Mama Claudette Baul, who allowed me to live with them and my best friend Charles Dennis, as I transitioned from eight to ninth grade.

My early childhood pastors that I can remember, of whom I heard the Gospel first preached. I was first baptized at Mt. Hebron Baptist Church while Rev. J. J. Roberson was the pastor. This was my Paw Paw's church. I would likewise go to church with my grandmother at Fourth Missionary Baptist Church, where Rev. E. Stanley Branch was the pastor. For a brief period, my mother was at a church called People's Hope, Rev. J. Richardson was the pastor. These churches and pastors spoke into my life in my impressionable years.

My development and discipleship came under Pastor William A. Lawson, at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. I acknowledge and appreciate the family of Wheeler

Avenue in my life and ministry. Countless members poured into my life and ministry. I list these few because they are connected to larger support groups, Rev. Roosevelt “Rudy” Howard, who led a group called Young Life; Rev. Warren “Olu” Chapman, my mentor and friend; Mrs. Lois Beverley, my eleventh grade English teach who told me then, I would be a preacher; Men’s Bible Study group, Rev. Jerimiah Wright, Deacon Dalton Hughes, Deacon Bill Solomon, Deacon Charles Brown and others; my College Sunday School and Baptist Polity teacher, Deacon Maurice Carr. In addition to these, I want to acknowledge the gifted and seasoned preachers that Pastor Lawson brought to Wheeler annually that spoke into my preaching development: Rev. Dr. Jerimiah A. Wright Jr., Bishop Walter Scott Thomas, Rev. Dr. K. T. Whalum, and my current Senior Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby.

To Dr. Harold Hudson, for the support and his encouraging presence. To my mentors, Rev. Dr. Lucius Dalton, and Bishop Lisa Weah, for their encouragement to “trust the process.” To our faculty consultant, Dr. Rychie Breidenstein for your support in thesis and title. Special thanks to my editor, Dr. Lori D. Spears, your support lightened the writing burden.

To my doctoral colleagues of liberation and soon to be doctoral recipients, Rev. Carmen “Angela Davis” Knight, Rev. Ntatu “Maya Angelou” North, and my peer associate, Rev. Kevin “Malcom X” Sykes. It has been my joy to share this journey with each of you as we come through this process. To my peer associate Sykes, we have spurned one another on to do good work in the Lord. We will continue our friendship and ministry work beyond the academy.

To my family, my wife, my rib, my partner in marriage and ministry, Mrs. Kimberley A. Denkins, you have sacrificed and supported in innumerable ways since I accepted the call to preach. You have kept our home a place of peace and a refuge in times of transitions. To our two gifts from God that have been the wind beneath my wings of desire and drive, Ms. Shelby A. Denkins and Mr. Joshua D. Denkins, thank you for your sacrifice and support in this journey. “But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).



## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to Blessed Hope Baptist Church and the leadership team that serves with me in doing the Kingdom work of Jesus the Christ in the northeast area of Houston, Texas. Thank you for the joy in our “Journey to Greater” as we continue to “Rise Up and Build”!

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## **INTRODUCTION**

I had no idea when I began this doctoral process, what would be birthed and clarified in this journey. The Proctor method that the ministry has been in you from the beginning. I discovered and have seen how God has developed me for the ministry work that He has led me to do at Blessed Hope Baptist Church. We both have experienced tragedies and traumatic seasons in our lives.

My ministry context is Blessed Hope Baptist Church. I am the fourth pastor, now serving this congregation for almost nine years. My two former predecessors serve approximately five years each and split the church both times. Blessed Hope Baptist Church had experienced stability in her first forty-eight years of existence but the last twenty plus years have been challenging. During the last twenty plus years, she has experienced abandonment, bitterness, confusion, disappointment, hurt and much pain. The people needed to be reborn and rebuilt because only a remnant remained that remembered the church in its former glory. Through the rebirthing and rebuilding, God can make all things new and restore that which was once before, shall be made new again. It is my supposition that when a church (community or company) develops a holistic biblical infrastructure then the church (community or company) will thrive when it experiences tragedies and transitions in its life existence.

The biblical foundations chapter was birth from in Nehemiah chapter two. The biblical text capsules and is almost parallel to the conditions Blessed Hope Baptist

Church had experienced when God called me to serve this church. The restoration of the walls serves as a reminder to Judah, that God was their Protector. Upon their return from exile, they would have to participate in the rebuilding project of a painful experience of being captured and held captive, but now they must process their pain to promote their progress of restoring the walls around Jerusalem. Nehemiah's God given strategy of rebuilding the walls was to invite and involve all who had lost their hope. The rebuilding was a memorial and provided momentum for all that God was going to do in redeeming and restoring His people.

It is my hope and prayer, for my ministry assignment at Blessed Hope Baptist Church, that God will continue to restore and rebuild His church. We must not allow the disasters, destructions nor devastations that have occurred in the church to wipe out our hope. The reality is that transitions and tragedies will occur throughout our lifetime, but we must always remain to be a people of hope, because our God has all power! As believers in Jesus Christ, we are the redeemed and the remnant that must commit our hands to this good work, "let us rise up and build!"

The historical foundations chapter is born from the African Diaspora. The planters of this new land would need a labor force to work the ground for a cheap wage, because the goal was profit. Indentured servants first arrived in America in the decade following the settlement of Jamestown by the Virginia Company in 1607. The idea of indentured servitude was born from a need for cheap labor on this new land. The earliest settlers soon realized that they had lots of land to care for, but no one to care for it. So, with the passage to the colonies being expensive for all but the wealthy, the Virginia Company

developed the system of indentured servitude to attract workers, who mainly ended up being people of color. Indentured servants became vital to the colonial economy.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, the settlers (or planters) who would be the leaders in this New World have been solely focused on the economic growth of one group and to have a fixed cheap labor group.

This has been embedded and has been fed into our society from the beginning that has been justified by a capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity by oppression, which is not Christianity at all. When the indentured servants who were the same hue as the settlers, became too expensive because once they either escaped or fulfilled their service contract, then they were awarded a freedom package that included “...at least 25 acres of land, a year's worth of corn, arms, a cow and new clothes.”<sup>2</sup> The answer to this expensive rising cost came across the Atlantic Oceans on ships in inhumane conditions because it was not about humanity nor morality; it was about a hunger for having more, greed, with little to no expense, off the backs of enslaved Africans.

The theological foundations chapter involves the progressive movement of the systematic theory of liberation theology into black liberation theology. Liberation theology seeks to empower and uplift those who have been left out, locked out, looked over and intentionally marginalized. This theology connects with the struggle and suffering of those who are oppressed and seeks to deconstruct the hypocrisy of western

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<sup>1</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” Oregon Public Broadcasting, <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

<sup>2</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

Christianity, that has been the catalyst in oppression of people of color. This project seeks to address the deconstructive behaviors and beliefs that causes and creates a deconstructive nature in our communities and environments. The oppressed people seeking liberation that comes from a biblical view of Jesus as Liberator, not this cosmetic European painting of Jesus that does not accurately display the features of the resurrected and victorious Jesus of Revelation found in chapter one. This systemic religion and theological view of western capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity that has been perpetuated and passed on to enslaved Africans and their descendants as the white savior.

The development of a holistic biblical infrastructure of that would assist churches and communities to thrive when tragedies and transitions arise, was not just birthed in Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Howard Thurman, Fannie Lou Hammer, Martin Luther King Jr., James H. Cone, and other theologians that fought for the rights of freedom, but across the world liberation was and is still a movement. This movement was and is led by people who had/have a heart for humanity and those who were overlooked and underserving in the eyes of those in power, such as the Black Lives Matter grassroots movement. A group of ordinary people who connect to an extraordinary God for the empowerment of liberating themselves and all who are oppressed. Developing holistic biblical views of infrastructure for church and community is essential for the liberation and restoration of this generation and for generations to come.

The interdisciplinary foundations chapter is supported by the discipline of sociology “examining the dynamic of constituent parts of societies such as institutions,

communities, populations, gender, racial, or age groups.” This discipline impacts social institutions and interactions of people and culture, how they function based upon what has been established which leads the focus on Critical Race Theory.

In conclusion, by journeying through these foundations led me to the process of deconstructing and reconstructing cycle. By building health holistic biblical infrastructure strategies that I used while conducting my research, I discovered that all individuals and institutions will experience devastation or tragedy at various times in life. One of the strategies is to encourage spiritual maturity in our membership. Our method of Bible study on Wednesday’s nights is to cover what was preached on the previous Sunday. This allows for reinforcement of what was grasped and understood from Sunday’s sermon. This method allows for individuals to ask their questions about Sunday’s sermon and provide clarity for their continued spiritual growth. Additionally, they can share their insights and areas of growth, this method is an essential element of encouragement for their spiritual maturity. Another area of increased spiritual maturity that has displayed in the growth of individual’s prayer life. Many individuals are now more aware and understand more about God and His Word, so they look forward to spending time with the Lord.

I am charged to liberate and rebuild by the transformative words and works of Jesus, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk. 4:18-19 NKJV).

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

The symbolism of the Phoenix, like the mystical bird itself, dies and is reborn across cultures and throughout time. Ancient legend paints a picture of a magical bird, radiant and shimmering, which lives for several hundred years before it dies by bursting into flames. It is then reborn from the ashes, to start a new, long life. So powerful is the symbolism that it is a motif and image that is still used commonly today in popular culture and folklore.

The legendary Phoenix is a large, grand bird, much like an eagle or peacock. It is brilliantly colored in reds, purples, and yellows, as it is associated with the rising sun and fire. Sometimes a nimbus will surround it, illuminating it in the sky. Its eyes are blue and shine like sapphires. It builds its own funeral pyre or nest and ignites it with a single clap of its wings. After death it rises gloriously from the ashes and flies away.<sup>1</sup>

Amidst the ashes and the brokenness of life, there is a spirit of rebirth and rebuilding. What had once been shall be made new! If a strategy and structure were in place, then the recovery from this place of devastation would not be so arduous. I submit that this work will have many common characteristics of the legend of the phoenix, the main difference being the author of the rebirth is Christ alone (Solus Christus)!

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<sup>1</sup> Liz Leafloor, "Symbolism of the Mythical Phoenix Bird: Renewal, Rebirth and Destruction," Ancient Origins, <http://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/ancient-symbolism-magical-phoenix-002020>.



“This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long.” This hymn resounds in my spirit as I am still contemplating and reflecting as I progress through this doctoral program. In researching this hymn, Fanny Crosby who was born on March 24, 1820, raised mostly by her grandmother because her father died early in her life and her mother became a widow at twenty-one years old and worked as a maid. Fanny’s grandmother became the primary nurturer in her life because of changing family dynamics and her physical limitation of being blind. This hymn came to be while her friend, a composer, Phoebe Palmer Knapp played a tune on the piano and asked Fanny what it sounded like, she said, “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine.” Throughout this chapter I share my story and how I am still learning and loving the depths of His “Blessed Assurance.”

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.” I was born March 24, 1968, which just happened to be an Easter Resurrection Sunday morning. I was the baby born to teenage parents in high school. My grandparents were believers in Christ; and I attended both Baptist and Church of God In Christ (COGIC) churches. I felt the presence of God in my life before I was seven years old. I remember being in church on a Wednesday night and the pastor opened the doors of the church and I had stumbled over someone’s shoe getting out the row into the aisle to go give my profession of faith in Christ to the pastor. I was baptized at Mt. Hebron Baptist Church, where Rev. J. J. Robertson was the pastor. My Paw Paw (my mother’s father) was an usher at Mt. Hebron; and I stayed with my grandparents almost every weekend. I attended Mt. Hebron with my mother sometimes and with my grandfather mostly. I was also developed in my

Christian journey at Fourth Missionary Baptist Church, where Rev. E. Stanley Branch was the pastor. I attended Fourth Missionary with my grandmother (my mother's mother) on weekends that I was not with my Paw Paw or other grandparents. Paw Paw and grandmother had divorced before I was born, but they both raised and supported me in my early childhood years. My Nina (my father's mother) who also was a major influence and support in my life, raised and supported me throughout my life into adulthood. The Laws (my stepfather's parents) supported me through my high school and my college years. My grandparents are and were "my pillars" throughout my life's journey.

In my ministry context, there have been waves of joys, but the momentum on those joys were interrupted by the death of the founding Pastor, Rev. J. E. Green of Blessed Hope Baptist Church. Pastor Green served the church for forty-eight years and during the last two years of his service, his health was not the best. The pioneering efforts of Pastor Green and the congregation's location in Wallisville Garden was where these God-size moves were being made. The land that the church now occupies and has expanded upon, was once occupied by children of the night, it was occupied by a night club. Now children of light have occupied the property for more than seventy years, but it has not all been glorious and grand. The church has been in mourning, it is been hijacked by former members and pastors. It has been fractured by the death of saints and the splits she has experienced. These experiences have left her in a heap of rubble with a fraction of the membership that she once bolstered.

After the graduation of Pastor Green from labor to reward, the second pastor of Blessed Hope, who was decades younger than Pastor Green, added to the numbers of the church, but the church did not continue to mature spiritually. There arose disunity in the

body and the congregation which had just laid to rest their Moses, in Pastor Green. Five years later, the church was dealing with their first divorce of pastor and people, that fractured the Blessed Hope Family. In 2003, Blessed Hope Baptist Church who had been known as a family-oriented church, where members raised their children together, grew in the Word together, got ordained and served in ministry together, now had her core torn apart because the church was splitting. While still in mourning, many members followed the second pastor, but just as many members remained. This was the family taking sides and not reconciling. Those that remained felt abandoned, no longer was Blessed Hope Baptist Church seen as a place of stability. She was fractured right down the middle. She was hurting and still longing for and mourning the loss of her first Pastor, Rev. J. E. Green.

In 2004, Blessed Hope seemed to be determined with the help of the Lord to continue to serve and worship Jesus Christ. The third pastor was called to lead Blessed Hope. This pastor came into a church that was hurting and mourning from a great deal of lost. The church seemed to maintain as best they could, the third pastor's tenure concludes with more pain. Blessed Hope Baptist Church experienced another church split, the church experienced a fire, and all of this happens in 2010. The devastation of another divorce of pastor and people and all the history and pictures that were filed at the church became ashes and pain that was painted in memory of what use to be Blessed Hope Baptist Church.

The tenure of my predecessors, Rev. J. E. Green, founding pastor served forty-eight years; the second pastor served about five years; and the third pastor served about six years. In 2011, I begin to candidate for the pastorate of Blessed Hope Baptist Church.

It was the pattern of the two predecessors before me and many of the other candidates for the pastorate of Blessed Hope Baptist Church that they were traditional singing preachers, my style is expository preaching. From April 2011 until April 2012, I was a candidate for the pastorate at Blessed Hope Baptist Church. The list of candidates was more than ninety and as it was ordained by God, the call fell on me. I would hear from those in attendance, “we need the Word” or “we are thirsty for the Word” during the time that I was a candidate for the pastorate of Blessed Hope Baptist Church. Well, I had no issue with delivering God’s mail, nor His message and that is what I shared with them each time that I was given the opportunity. I preached the uncompromising Word of God!

The writer of the church history of Blessed Hope Baptist Church, I believed spoke prophetically as my pastoral tenure began. It states, “On April 28, 2012, God blessed us with Pastor Jacques D. Denkins, who came with unity and love in his heart; and we are thankful to God for placing us with a faithful and dedicated spirit-filled servant. Let us continue to ask God to strengthen and unite us together, in great numbers. Allow him to use us as co-laborers on his mission, of “Building up the Body of Christ.” This expresses what I have been attempting to do with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to build up and unify Blessed Hope Baptist Church. We support families of Blessed Hope that are no longer attending the church when there are deaths in the family of faith. We are seeking to be God’s servants to bring restoration to the church that has meant so much to many former and present members by our ministry of presence and service.

Blessed Hope is in an industrialized area. There are only two residential streets, in the area called Wallisville Garden. To the north of the church is the Northshore community and going south are many trucking and parts businesses, Oates Prairie

community and Oates Elementary School. We have supported the Oates elementary school with school supplies for the students and teachers for the past five years. The congregation is mostly blue-collar workers, longshoremen, truck drivers, plant workers, schoolteachers, nurses and retirees. This is the community that the church seeks to empower with the love of Christ through Christian education and service.

In my own journey, I have dealt with devastation. Those that provided stability for me were my grandparents. Having been born to teenage parents, my pillars, participated and played a major role to influence my life. For most of my formative years and into my teenage years, my life was full of adjustments and rapid change. During these times stability and security would have been more beneficial for my adolescence development. I learned what seemed bad and unfortunate, at that time, was the process God was using to shape my life. During those years while dealing with swift transitions, my pillars, had me in church growing in the Word of God. Music has always been a comfort for me, but scripture is primary. One of the songs that would encourage me the most was, “Be Grateful” by Walter Hawkins. This song reminded me that my perspective should always be upward. Each phase and sequence in life has a meaning and purpose, although I could not see at that time; but I should stay focused and be grateful. As I moved around from house to house, living with family and friends a mindset of gratefulness kept me appreciative and humble for everything that happened in my life. Family or not, people do not have to be kind nor nice to you, but the providential care of God has kept me. I am truly grateful.

In addition to my pillars, being a stabilizing force in my life, the other anchor for me has been Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. I have matriculated and matured under the

pastoral leadership of our Founding Pastor Emeritus, Rev. William A. Lawson and my current Pastor, Rev. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby. I have grown in my Christian discipleship at Wheeler Avenue. I have learned leadership and how to lead church meetings. I have worked in youth and young adult ministry with my mentors Rev. Warren “Olu” Chapman and Rev. Roosevelt “Rudy” Howard. I was called to preach the Gospel under Pastor Lawson and received an understanding of the unconditional love of God through the Prophetic Preaching of the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. who preached our annual Martin L. King, Jr. revivals at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. During this time, I was seeking the Lord on what He had for me to do in the Kingdom.

One Saturday afternoon while sitting on the porch reading my Bible and praying, I was reading a passage in Isaiah and I heard the Lord say, “I have called you to preach!” The passage was Isaiah the forty-second chapter. After this encounter I went to my Big Brother’s house (Deacon Timothy Bryant, who stayed a block away) to share the joy and the peace that God had given me confirmation to preach. I made an appointment to meet with Pastor Lawson thinking that I was going to share what God had done and revealed to me in the scripture, that it would be a revelation to him also that I had been called to preach. Pastor Lawson met with me and upon sharing with him that I felt God’s calling to preach he replied, “I have known this for a long time Jacques, but I am glad that you have yielded to the calling of God and that this calling to preach is a call to preparation. So, I need you to get back in school and then begin your theological training.”

I begin to experience several life changing events, after I accepted my call to preach, I got engaged to my wife, Kimberley and one of my pillars died on February 7, 1996. This was Paw Paw. He was a “man’s man.” He was a veteran; he was strong, a

well-groomed gentleman. Paw Paw was the stable male figure in my life; and I had learned so much from being in his presence.

On November 29, 1996, Kimberley and I got married. Kimberley was a believer in Christ already; and now she was becoming a member Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. I did not know what treasure God had given me as I began my journey into the unknown highs and lows of ministry through my wife, Kimberley. I continued to work and serve in ministry at Wheeler Avenue and began to study and train for what it meant to be a minister. I continued to work with the youth and the young adult ministry at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church; and I served with Rev. Olu Chapman. By October of 1997, I was ordained for the Christian Ministry.

My wife and I had discussed, prior to marriage, that whenever we had children, she would come home, to create and provide an environment that would give our children the start in life that we did not have and what we desired for them. Prayerfully, this would propel them into being well-rounded and developed Christian children. This was our sacrifice, this was our struggle, but it was our desire; and little did we know how God would develop our faith because of the leap of faith that we desired to do as parents. In 1998, we were blessed with our first born, our daughter, Shelby. I remember when my wife came off maternity leave, she submitted her resignation letter to her company; we began to experience the weight of our desired sacrifice. Two weeks later, I received a pink slip. The company was downsizing, and I had a choice to take a package or I could go into a department that required me to work seven days a week, with split shifts. I was at a crossroads. I had a wife, a new baby, now a family to care for; and my wife had just resigned from her job. I had to make a choice of looking for new employment or taking

the severance package with no insurance or going into a department that I have never worked in, that they said, “anybody could do it.” “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).

Praying to God about the decision I needed to make for my family, I was led to choose the seven day a week job with the split shifts so that I could keep benefits and provide for my family. We endured periods where our faith was tested; and we endured many trials. I shared with the supervisor of my new department that I would work six days a week but on Sundays, I had to be off to be at church, because I was a minister. God gave me favor in my request.

“And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand” (Gen. 39:3). I felt like Joseph, I did not know why I was put in this situation, but I knew God was with me and my family the entire time. For the next four months I would wake up about 5:00 a.m. in the morning to catch a bus for 5:30 a.m. to be at work before 7:00 a.m.; because my first shift began at 7:00 a.m. At this point in our marriage, we only had one vehicle and I did not want my wife and baby to be stranded at home because the car would have just been in the garage at work. I would get off about 12:30 p.m. or 1:00 p.m. My family picked me up from work and I would have some time with my wife, get an opportunity to read and talk with our daughter and then sleep for an hour or so, because I had to be back to work for 6:00 p.m.; and I did not get off until 11:00 p.m.

During this time, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church was continuing to grow under Pastor Lawson, and he had just hired our new Associate Pastor, the Reverend Marcus D.



Cosby, in 1998. In addition to bringing Rev. Cosby on staff, Pastor Lawson also hired a Youth Minister and a Christian Education Minister a year later. I began serving as the youth minister and as Rev. Cosby's assistant in his role as Associate Pastor.

During this time, I enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to complete my undergraduate studies and begin graduate studies. One of the assignments Rev. Cosby had been given by Pastor Lawson was to begin a Sunday night service that we named Sunday Night Live. This service began at 6:00 p.m. every Sunday evening and Rev. Cosby, the praise team and I would lead the evening worship service. Sunday Night Live was a great training ground for me as I learned the details and the planning that went into leading a worship service and to serve the pastor in worship. Serving was not an issue for me, because under Pastor Lawson we had been taught to be servants of Christ and to assist in all areas of ministry where God was at work. At that moment in my life, I was a husband, father and a minister serving on the staff of my home church, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. I was not sure what God was doing but was grateful for where God has brought me from. It has been a mighty long journey, but I am glad about it. As I began developing in ministry and attending seminary, I began to have a greater hunger and thirst for the Word of God more than I have ever had before.

While serving with Rev. Cosby, I would often drive him to different ministry opportunities around the city or if he was not able to attend, I would stand in for him. On one occasion, I went to fill in for Rev. Cosby at a prayer breakfast, sometime had passed after that prayer breakfast and the church contacted Pastor Lawson to inquire if I could submit my name to serve as their pastor. Pastor Lawson gave his approval for me to candidate for the church, I did not know what I was doing, but I was willing to serve

wherever God was leading. My wife was with me, she kept asking me was I sure. I began to fast and pray. On a couple of occasions God spoke very clearly and profoundly, once we were at dinner and a gentleman leaving the restaurant came over to our table and said, “be encouraged, do whatever God is leading you to do.” On another occasion while I was out for a morning walk on the track, where I thought I was all alone, a woman came out of nowhere and said, “Trust God, He is with you.”

“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge” (Ps. 46:10-11). This passage of scripture was given to me by the Lord. The scripture gave me comfort and peace to trust Him; and as Pastor Lawson had already told me, “Jacques, they will call you to be their Pastor” and they did. Now, I am not just a husband, father, minister of the Gospel, but now I am serving as a pastor of a church. This church was located miles away from my neighborhood and Wheeler Avenue. I had to trust God.

“Get out of your country, From your family, And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). I felt like Abram in my new area of ministry because I went to a suburb of Houston. I had to leave my staff position at Wheeler and head out into the land of the unknown and discover what grassroots and bi-vocational ministry was all about. This was another opportunity for God to grow our faith because my wife and daughter were with me as I sought to heed God’s calling on my life. This church had been together for more than a decade and their pastor had taken a job out of state and left them. They did not want to break up and were meeting in an office park, in an industrialized area. I soon discovered that the church had never incorporated, so I begin to learn what it meant to plant and start a church. My wife and I went through

courses for church planting; and we began our ministry. I served this church for eight years and one of my seminary friends that I asked to come to preach periodically when I was absent was voted in by the church when I resigned. My resignation came as I felt God telling me my time was up and my family had grown.

My wife and I were blessed with our second child, a son, his name is Joshua. Joshua was born with a rare immune deficiency called Wiskott Aldrich Syndrome. The only cure for this immune deficiency was a bone marrow transplant. My wife and I both got tested to see if we were a match for the bone marrow transplant, but we were not. The Lord had a ram in the bush, our first born, Shelby, was also tested to see if she would be a match. Sibling matches are long shots and rarely heard of, but God revealed that He was still a Miracle Worker. Shelby was a perfect match. Six out of six for the bone marrow transplant was an identical and perfect match. At six years old, our brave little girl, Shelby gave bone marrow to her baby brother, Joshua, who was only three months old at the time of the transplant. Early in the morning while we were getting prepared for surgery, guess who walks in to have prayer with our family, Pastor Lawson and other close family members of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. These believers had received me, and now my family as their own, and were present with us during this life challenging and faith growing experience in our son's life. We would have the prayers and support of Wheeler Avenue and the young church that I was pastoring at that time going up for our family continually.

I continued to work and serve as pastor of the church; my daughter was in the first grade. I took my daughter to school, go to work and one of the parents at my daughters' school or one of the members at Wheeler would assist with picking her up from school

until I got off work. Then we would go to the hospital to see Mom and Joshua at Texas Children's Hospital in the evening. My wife would do Shelby's hair and I would get an opportunity to see my son as God was healing his body. I got to experience the unconditional love through my wife's care, compassion and consistent attention to our son in the hospital. On Fridays, I would change places with my wife, so she could go home, shower, spend time with Shelby and sleep in her own bed and prayerfully get ready for the next weeks journey. My wife would come back to the hospital either late Saturday night or early Sunday morning, because I was still serving as pastor to the new church. We did this for more than three months. Once Joshua made the 100-day mark and had no rejection to the bone marrow, we begin to make preparation to take him home. God is so faithful!

Trust in Him who will not leave you, Whatsoever years may bring,  
If by earthly friends forsaken Still more closely to Him cling.  
Hold to God's unchanging hand, Hold to God's unchanging hand;  
Build your hopes on things eternal, Hold to God's unchanging hand.<sup>2</sup>

Once we got Mom and Joshua home, the next phase of our journey was to be in isolation for about the next two years because of Joshua's condition, the smallest infection could be fatal. Joshua had weekly, sometimes daily hospital visit. This perfect match was God's miracle for our family and all who had been praying with and for us. God had again, through this valley experience, increased my faith in Him and what He had called me to do was serve Him without question. As years passed, Joshua's health continued to improve and our daughter has no health challenges, and both are well today.

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<sup>2</sup> Jennie Wilson, "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand," Hymnary,  
[http://www.hymnary.org/text/time\\_is\\_filled\\_with\\_swift\\_transition](http://www.hymnary.org/text/time_is_filled_with_swift_transition).

After my resignation from the church, they have continued to grow, under the leadership of their new pastor; and I am still in communication with them. I returned to serve on staff at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, now under the new Pastor, Rev. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby as the Minister to Senior Adults.

In my role of service, I am serving a population that has watched my Christian growth and journey throughout my adolescence into adulthood. It is my joy to serve those who paved the way and upon whose shoulders my generation and I now stand. Our church is intentionally intergenerational, and I enjoy serving the elder generation. “Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest, watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.”<sup>3</sup>

I thought I would just go back to my role of serving on the staff of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, upon completion of the Master of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and wait until the Lord called me. Not so, said the Lord, my pastor knowing how God has gifted me to serve and has no question about my loyalty, continued to allow me to minister as God provided opportunities. I became a candidate in a pastoral search at a church in the Houston area. My pastor allowed me to candidate, the church had two splits and only a remnant of the congregation remained. The congregation’s founding pastor served forty-eight years and I am the fourth pastor, now serving this congregation for almost seven years. Our church is located on the eastside of Houston, many of the members are former educators, postal workers, truck drivers, nurses, shift workers and plant workers. Like the first church that I served, God called me to an unfamiliar area and away from what I was comfortable with.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanny Crosby, “Blessed Assurance,” Hymnary, [http://www.hymnary.org/text/blessed\\_assurance\\_jesus\\_is\\_mine](http://www.hymnary.org/text/blessed_assurance_jesus_is_mine).

“This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long; This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long.”<sup>4</sup>

The ministry work that the Lord has been preparing me for in diverse and unique ways, throughout my life as I have experienced abandonment, continual changes of separations, devastating realities of death and having to totally stretch out and trust in the Lord. There have been times when spiritual formation has played a vital role in my anchoring hope of my faith in Jesus Christ! I have continuously been reborn and rebuilt by life’s realities, from the ashes and the rubble, those broken pieces have been put together for me to mature in my faith and grow in boldness of belief in the God that I serve.

Likewise, Blessed Hope Baptist Church has experienced stability in her first forty-eight years of existence but the last twenty have been challenging and she has experienced abandonment, bitterness, confusion, disappointment, hurt and much pain. The people need to be reborn and rebuilt because only a remnant remains that remember the church in its former glory. In the rebirth and rebuilding, God will be able to make all things new and restore what once was lost. It is my supposition that when a church (community or company) develops a holistic infrastructure then the church (or any entity) would thrive when it experiences tragedies and transitions in the life of its existence.

I will seek the Lord as Nehemiah did as he led the Israelites to rebuild the walls and as Ezra did in the rebuilding of the Temple of God. The strategy must include continual and consistent prayer, dedication and devotion to the Word of God and sharing and showing the love of Christ to all humanity.

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<sup>4</sup> Crosby, “Blessed Assurance,” [http://www.hymnary.org/text/blessed\\_assurance\\_jesus\\_is\\_mine](http://www.hymnary.org/text/blessed_assurance_jesus_is_mine).

“And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work” (Neh. 2:18). I am sure we are not the only church that had this experience in our history, nor am I the only pastor and or preacher who has come through trails to rise from the ashes to soar to the highest which God has ordained and predestined for my life and ministry. I will seek to engage churches and pastors to hear their stories and how they have handled or are handling similar experiences to guide Blessed Hope to the height to which the Lord is calling her. My project will focus on rebuilding and restoring vitality to churches and communities after they have experienced disasters and devastation.

It is my desire that my project will assist to rebirth and rebuild churches and people to rise from their past, to believe again, to dream again and out of the ashes they shall soar to the rising Son, Jesus Christ! “But those who wait on the Lord, Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint” (Is. 40:31).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

In reflection of the synergy chapter, the ministry context is Blessed Hope Baptist Church and the Book of Nehemiah, specifically, Nehemiah the second chapter parallels the condition of Israel's return after captivity. In the Book of Nehemiah, Israel had been disobedient; and God allowed Jerusalem to be pillaged by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians. Only a small amount remains, and the temple and the walls of Jerusalem are in ruins.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon's Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. So I went up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work. Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good (Neh. 2:11-18).

In the Hebrew Bible the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book, which focuses on the reconstruction and restoration of both the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.



This seemed to be a unique time in the life of Israel, and likewise, it is a unique time at Blessed Hope Baptist Church. Nehemiah saw the conditions of the walls of Jerusalem and used it as an opportunity to engage the people to “let us rise up and build.” The same God that gave Nehemiah the strategy and vision of reconstruction and restoration along with granting him favor with the king, is the same God that will assist in the completion of work at Blessed Hope Baptist Church. The research hypothesis is when the church (community, city, couples, country or cultures) develops a holistic – infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come.

According to Josephus and other early writers, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah formed one book in the early Hebrew Bible entitled the book of Ezra. The earliest Hebrew manuscript in which the two books are divided is dated 1448, and modern Hebrew Bibles refer to them as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In manuscripts of the Greek OT (LXX), they also formed one book. Origen, in the beginning of the third century, is the first to attest to a division. There is general acknowledgment of the genuineness of the personal memoirs of Nehemiah, which constitute a major part of the book.<sup>1</sup>

In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away the first exiles from Jerusalem. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians returned, pillaged and burned the city and its temple, and took an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 Judeans into exile. The expatriates settled in various districts where they enjoyed a measure of freedom. They engaged in agriculture and commerce and in some instances acquired considerable wealth. The

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 943.

elders continued to function, prophets like Ezekiel ministered among the exiles, and resistance to religious apostasy was kept alive in the popular mind.<sup>2</sup>

Two separate groups of exiles returned to Judah and built a new sanctuary in Jerusalem on the site of Solomon's temple in 516 B.C. Then, under King Artaxerxes I (464–424 B.C.), two separate groups returned from Babylon under Ezra (458 B.C.) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.), respectively. From this seedbed there sprang the theocratic people of Judah, the Jews, dedicated to the law of God, isolated from foreign influence, and centered in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

The building of the altar and the Temple, of the community itself and the walls has been the task of three groups and characters, each prepared in exile and implemented in Judah by the medium of documents despite conflict.<sup>4</sup> Each renovation ends in solemn celebration. In previous chapters, it has been noted how these similarities point to the book's thematic development. Nehemiah's character was one of the most important thematic points of Ezra-Nehemiah. Nehemiah's commanding voice is added to this intricate pattern of recurrence and reverberation.<sup>5</sup> The narrative here is set in the same month as the last chapter and under a king also named Artaxerxes.<sup>6</sup> This is weak historical glue and there are no syntactical links. Nehemiah chapter one makes no direct

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<sup>2</sup> Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 943.

<sup>3</sup> Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 943.

<sup>4</sup> Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1988), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon F. Davies, *Beit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: Ezra and Nehemiah* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Japhet, *Composition and Chronology in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah, Second Temple Studies: 2 Temple and Community in the Persian Period*, JSOTS, vol. 175 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1994), 207.

reference to earlier episodes at all. Nehemiah hears of the distress of the Judahites as though it were unrelieved. He is stricken with sadness and mourns and prays. As an important official in the Persian court, he dares to seek the King's leave for a mission to rebuild Jerusalem; with all the necessary authority he journeys there.<sup>7</sup>

The Book of Nehemiah is written in a first-person narrative, hence that some scholars call it Nehemiah's Memoirs. Nehemiah speaks in his own words, in an autobiographical memoir that is almost unique in scripture. With Ezra's, the Memoirs of Nehemiah are the only continuous account of a person's career written autobiographically in the Hebrew Bible. From a rhetorical-critical perspective it is worthwhile to study how he manages the information and presents not only his own argument but also his audience's response to it.<sup>8</sup>

Nehemiah's voice and account of his rebuilding experience, "continues from Nehemiah 1 to 7 with parts of chapters 12-13 and possibly 10-11."<sup>9</sup> The reader experience and witnesses the anguish, burden, compassion, determination, emotions, the favor of God and the commitment to prayer in the Book of Nehemiah. God's favor upon Nehemiah in the presence of the king and the strategy that God gave him as he dealt with oppression and opposition as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The one central theme throughout the Book of Nehemiah is his prayer life and how God was with him in the rebuilding process.

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<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 81-82.

<sup>9</sup> D. J. A. Clines, "The Nehemiah Memoir: The Perils of Autobiography," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990), 124-164.

As in the intercessions of Ezra and Moses in Deuteronomy, Nehemiah identifies himself and his family with the Jews. It is not a public “sermon prayer” like Ezra’s in Ezra chapter nine and ten, overheard by the “God-fearers-of-Israel.” Nehemiah’s prayer conforms to the biblical genre of the lamentations of the people, where the one praying is making supplication for the salvation of the community. Broadly, a prayer in this genre starts with an invocation of God; then follow a confession of sins, a request to YHWH to remember his people, and a plea for success. Nehemiah’s own prayer is comprised of an expanded address formula to YHWH (v. 5), an appeal for hearing (v. 6a), a confession in his own name and that of his family and the people (vv. 6b-7), and an appeal to YHWH’s promises (vv. 8-9), followed by a supplication for the people (v. 10), and for his personal situation (v. 11a). While none of these elements are unfamiliar except the last one, their combination in this way is without parallel in scripture. The convention makes the anomalies all the more striking. He does not say what the sins were or that the people will no longer commit them. He speaks of the conditional covenant but asks YHWH’s help despite the people’s corruption. He alludes to sins condemned already by Moses, the punishment for which had been the exile.<sup>10</sup>

The setting of this passage is within allied with Ezra’s work of rebuilding the Temple. Nehemiah is the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, who after recognizing that Nehemiah’s countenance was different, inquired of Nehemiah’s condition. A servant to the king should not bring the king grief, for this could lead to their death. At the conclusion of chapter one, Nehemiah prayed to God about the condition of Jerusalem and was reminding God of His Word to Israel. At the conclusion of Nehemiah’s prayer, he

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<sup>10</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 83.

revealed that he is the king's cupbearer. The "cupbearer" attested throughout centuries of Persian history and legend was a favorite and trusted youthful official. Such a position would indeed best account for the instant success of his carefully nurtured attack on the monarch's resistance (1:4, 2:1-4; the king's only reply was "How soon will you come back?"). It would also account for the prompt success of his wall building (6:15). The "honorable and privileged" dignity of the cupbearer ("wine taster," or at least trusted authority responsible for the king's nutriment reaching him free of poisoning).<sup>11</sup>

Nehemiah's prayer and faith in God was his covering before the king with a sad countenance. The king had a right to be concerned when Nehemiah's countenance had changed, because as cupbearer, his role was to taste everything before the king. If it were poisoned the king would know it by the cupbearer's countenance. God has a unique way of allowing us to be developed to fulfill our purpose for His glory. Nehemiah's name meant what God would not just do for him, but through him. Nehemiah's name means "the Lord comforts" and was appropriate for this time of hope and fulfillment.<sup>12</sup>

God positioned Nehemiah in a servant role that placed him in the presence of the king who would grant Nehemiah his request. The king asked Nehemiah, "What do you request?" (2:5). Nehemiah does not answer the king's question before he prays to God again; then he makes his request known unto the king. The king's only response to Nehemiah was a timeline for his journey.

At first, he does not mention Jerusalem or its walls. The king remembers that the Judahites' enemies had once called it rebellious and wicked "If this city is rebuilt and its

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<sup>11</sup> David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1069.

<sup>12</sup> Elwell and Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 942.

walls finished, you will have no tax revenue” (Ezra 4:12,16). He says instead that he wants to honor his ancestors’ graves. Who could resist such an emotional appeal? The suspense heightens when the king counters with a question of his own. “For what do you make request?” So [Nehemiah] prayed to God of the heavens.” The king is a daunting figure even in the act of granting the request. He complies by asking still more questions: How long will your journey last, and when will you return?” (2:6). Nehemiah dares to press him for laissez-passer and requisition notices. Now he mentions the wall (2:8). We knew immediately that Ezra would succeed because he was favored by YHWH (Ezra 7:6). It is only as the suspense of this scene winds down that we knew the same of Nehemiah, “the good hand of [his] God was upon [him]” (2:8).<sup>13</sup>

The text gives further evidence of the favorable presence of God with Nehemiah when Nehemiah makes additional request for materials and an escort of the king’s army to accompany him on his journey. God is comforting Nehemiah as He is preparing him to go back to rebuild and restore what has been destroyed and through this project of restoration, the children of Israel will experience the comfort of the Lord.

We have plainly learned from the teaching of Isaiah how Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, represents a figure of the Lord Savior because he ended the captivity of the people of God and decreed the temple be restored. So too, we can properly take the successor of this same empire, Artaxerxes, who with the same devotion ordered that the city of Jerusalem be rebuilt, as a type of the Lord, who builds a city for himself from living stones (that is, the one church made from all the elect) through the service of preachers. Therefore it is appropriate that the name Artaxerxes means a light that tests silently. For the Lord is indeed the light of life who test the hearts of his faithful silently, at times illuminating them with the sweetness of celestial grace, at others clouding them with the burdens of this life, so that, instructed by temporal adversities, they might desire eternal goods more ardently.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Owen C. Thomas, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Old Testament V* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 336-337.

Now the text further reveals that there are some who do not want the Lord to comfort the afflicted and destroyed land of Jerusalem. They wanted it to remain in the detestable condition it was in. If rebuilding and restoration did not come forth, the desolation would serve as a reminder of their situation and to continue to oppress those in exile that they would not have a homeland to return to. These two agitators and tormentor are Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite.

It is important to note the difference in their mood and situation in comparison to what it had been earlier. It was previously stated that those who had remained from the captivity of Judea were “in great distress and disgrace” (1:3). As a result, they were weeping and rendering prayers because the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed and its gates burned down by fire. Now, by contrast, the enemies of this same holy city were saddened and became greatly distressed. They realized that the buildings were about to be restored and at the same time the citizens would be delivered from the insults of their enemies.<sup>15</sup>

The scripture reveals that they were deeply disturbed because Nehemiah sought to rebuild what used to be a fortified wall of the City of Jerusalem. Sanballat and Tobiah were a great source of opposition for Nehemiah and those who worked with him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The pericope for the biblical foundations is found in the context of Nehemiah 2:11-18:

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 337.

Refuse Gate and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. So I went up in the night by the valley and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work. Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

The time and method chosen by Nehemiah are significant. With a small group of carefully selected men and only one donkey, he quietly set out on his mission. His plan of attack was kept secret so as not to arouse the people or to tip his hand prematurely to the enemies within or without (vs. 12 and 16). With that first-hand information he confronted the officials and the people of Jerusalem, who responded enthusiastically to his plan (vs. 17-18).<sup>16</sup>

It is not difficult to understand Nehemiah's concern for secrecy as he first turned his attention to the question of the wall that had been destroyed. He would have known of the opposition that led to its destruction (Ezra 4) and was doubtless aware that Sanballat and Tobiah had allies in the city who would quickly report on his movements. Until he gauged the size of the problem, he decided how to tackle it, and was ready to start. He did not want to stir up trouble which could pose difficulties enough at any stage of the work, as the sequel shows, but which would be most threatening of all to the project before the work began. One by-product of this concern is a passage of exceptionally enthralling narrative. The need to work "by night" was self-evident, whatever practical difficulties it

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<sup>16</sup> Jacob M. Myers, *The Anchor Bible Ezra – Nehemiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), 104.



posed. As Rudolph parenthetically observes, it is to be hoped that it was at least a moonlit night. These “few men” who accompanied him must have been privy to his plans, so perhaps they were members of his household. Perhaps, they were residents in Jerusalem who could act as guides and those who had accompanied him from Babylon who he could trust for counsel. The one animal he allowed himself was doubtless a donkey or mule-surefooted and generally silent.<sup>17</sup>

Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s time consisted of the Temple Mount and the hill Ophel (or City of David), extending south from it. He left the city by the Valley Gate (v. 13), on the west side of Ophel, leading to the Tyropoeon Valley. He turned left, or south, and passed Dragon’s Spring, a water source that can no longer be identified on the east side of the Tyropoeon Valley. As he proceeded counterclockwise around the city, he came to the Dung Gate, some 1,000 cubits from the Valley Gate (3:13). Located at the southern end of Ophel, the Dung (or Rubbish) Gate got its name because excrement and other refuse from sacrificial systems were taken out through this gate; it is probably the same as the Potsherd Gate (Jer.19:2). Then he turned north and passed between the Fountain Gate, in the southeast corner of the city, and the King’s Pool. We may identify this pool with the waters of Shiloah (Isa.8:6) or lower pool (Isa.22:9) in the Kidron Valley. Josephus mentions a pool of Solomon. At this point in his inspection tour, Nehemiah had to dismount because the rubble was too difficult for his animal to maneuver, and he walked northward in the Kidron Valley as he inspected the wall. The eastern side of Ophel had been the terraced in pre-exilic times, and the destruction of the in 587 BCE may have precipitated considerable collapsing and erosion of the terrace system. Nehemiah later abandoned the part of the former city wall that lay on the northern half of the eastern slope and created a new stretch of wall on the crest. Finally, he retraced his steps and entered through the Valley Gate. He did not inspect the northern wall.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps, he could do that during daylight hours without arousing suspicion.<sup>19</sup>

After his inspection trip is over, Nehemiah reminds his supporters of the bad state of the city and its gates; and he urges them to rebuild the wall. His inspection had

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<sup>17</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 16, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 187-188.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 336-337.

<sup>19</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1999), 759.

confirmed Hanani's report: Jerusalem was in a state of disgrace. Nehemiah insisted that he was under divine commission and protection (v.18); and that the Persian king had also authorized his mission. The people quickly agreed to rebuild the city wall, and they encouraged one another in this good work. God, king, Nehemiah, and the people were in agreement.<sup>20</sup>

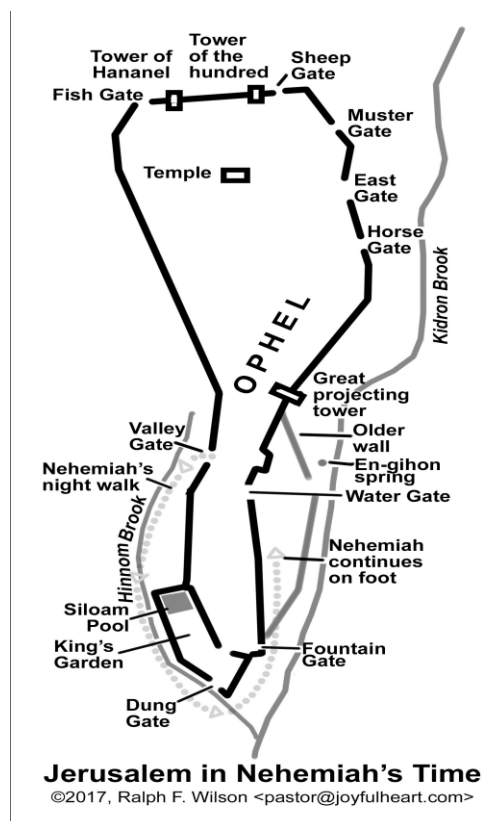


Figure 1. Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time<sup>21</sup>

“His [Nehemiah] purpose is not to propose the repair work systematically but to use the people's sorry state as the “*topos*” or topic through which to promote the deeper issue-our own engagement in the faith that should ground the identity of the Judahites.

<sup>20</sup> Klein, *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 761.

<sup>21</sup> Ralph F. Wilson, “Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Time,” Jesus Walk, 2017, <http://www.jesuswalk.com/rebuild/maps/jerusalem-in-nehemiah-day-1658x3362x300.jpg>.

Rhetorically the walls are raised but closed. They embrace the Judahites but invite others too.”<sup>22</sup>

Glenn Loury, an African American leader, has applied a reading of Nehemiah chapters one and two to his people. “What does it really mean for a city not to have walls?” he asks. “It is a powerful metaphor, and closely related to black people’s situation today. A city without walls has no integrity, or structure; it is subject to the vagaries of any fad or fancy. Without walls, you are lost, as opposed to having some kind of internally derived sense of who you are to help you decide what you will and won’t do.”<sup>23</sup>

“Jerusalem is physically closed but rhetorically opened by the reconstruction of its walls. Israel is helped in a new way to find its claim to meaning between the fact of historical transience and the enduring hope of divine redemption.”<sup>24</sup>

Nehemiah had a major compassion for the condition in Israel although he has a plush role of service in the king’s palace. His connection with God in prayer, his taking only a few select men on his mission, riding on a donkey and spending three days before he shares what God has placed on his heart and assigned to his hands. Nehemiah’s journey with this select group reveals his trust in their loyalty and in their nonverbal commitment to participate in the restoration of the Jerusalem walls. When Nehemiah first received the report on the condition of Jerusalem it was from Hanani, the survivors and

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<sup>22</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Robert S. Boynton, “Loury’s Exodus,” *The New Yorker*, May 1, 1995, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Davies, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, 86.

the city were in great distress and reproach. Nehemiah's expression to the king was the place of my father's tomb and the city lies in waste with its gates burned down.

Now Nehemiah and those that accompany him experienced and saw for themselves the condition of Jerusalem. Nehemiah calls it a distress and a disgrace.

His inspection had confirmed Hannani's report: Jerusalem was in a state of disgrace. Nehemiah insisted that he was under divine commission and protection and that the Persian king had also authorized his mission. People quickly agreed to rebuild the city wall, and they encourage one another in this good work. God, king, Nehemiah, and the people were in agreement.<sup>25</sup>

Nothing happens without God and nothing happens without God-given direction, granting favor, guidance and strategy to accomplish this mission for His glory. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28 NSRV). This quote by Fredrick Douglass models what Nehemiah felt, with the help of Lord and those who had survived captivity. "I prayed for freedom for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs."<sup>26</sup>

The destruction of the walls of Jerusalem was due to the rebellion of the Israelites to God. Now the rebuilding of the walls represented God's returning protection and power of the Holy City of Jerusalem and presence in the restoration of His people.

The wall itself was more than a protection for Jerusalem and its citizens. Its condition at the time was symbolic of the low esteem in which the Jews were held by their neighbors. Moreover, it was a reflection on the status of their religion in the eyes of surrounding peoples, and perhaps in the sight of the Persian officials of Across the River. Nehemiah saw clearly that the reproach could not be removed until the devoted Jews acted. Verse 18 makes it clear that he justified his mission religiously: Yahweh had shown his favor by granting him success in

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<sup>25</sup> Klein, *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 761.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Douglass, "Quote by Frederick Douglass," Goodreads, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/401026-i-prayed-for-freedom-for-twenty-years-but-received-no>.

negotiations with the king. At any rate, his hearers were impressed and resolved to support the work to which he summoned them.<sup>27</sup>

The leadership that Nehemiah exhibited shows his commitment to God, His people, the mission and the furtherance of His kingdom. Nehemiah's expressions of convictions and the evidence of the results of captivity before them in the condition of the walls of Jerusalem. The people joined Nehemiah in this good work. The work was good because it was God ordained and God ordered. Christians must resolve to know that God is at work in all things.

Nehemiah resembles Jesus Christ, who shared with His disciples what He would build up, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18 NKJV). Jesus speaks of what is to come and the opposition that would come against it. The beast of burden that Nehemiah rode when expecting the walls was likewise used by Jesus when he made His final entry into Jerusalem for the Passover. Nehemiah shows Christians the importance of being committed to prayer. Similarly, Jesus often prayed both publicly and privately. Jesus gave instructions on how to pray. Nehemiah's journey was with a few men and for three days. At night, after sharing the Passover meal and instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus with three of His most trusted disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The disciples could not stay awake, but Jesus is in communion with His Father on the plan of redemption. Jesus was crucified and buried, laid in a borrowed tomb; but on the third day morning Jesus was resurrected and in a transformed body. The work of Nehemiah post-exile is like the work of Jesus redeeming humanity back to God; it was a transformative work.

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<sup>27</sup> Myers, *The Anchor Bible*, 105.

The restoration of the walls serves as a reminder to Judah who they were to God. Upon their return from exile they have been restored. They endured devastation and destruction, but also as those who have been developed by disaster. Jesus took on the worst mutation of sin of all humanity and the world's highest condemnation it could give by becoming the sacrificial offering for humanity. By and through His obedience to God, redemption is now available to all who believe in Him. Nehemiah's rebuilding the walls campaign was to welcome all who had lost their hope and their way. The re-building was a memorial and a monument to all that God has redeeming and restoring power.

This is the hope and prayer as it relates to the ministry work assigned at Blessed Hope Baptist Church, that God will continue to restore and rebuild His Church; and that she will be a symbol of God's presence and power to revive after tragedy and transitions happen. One must not allow the disasters, destructions nor devastations to wipe out hope. The reality is that transition and tragedies will occur in this life, but one must always be a people of hope, because our God has all power! Christians are the redeemed and the remnant that are committing our hands to this good work, "let us rise up and build!"

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The period in history that supports the project is considered the “African Diaspora,” which is the journey of the enslaved Africans, to North America which is the focus of the research document. Moreover, North America will be referenced as its continental name and not the United States of America. Based upon the history of this country and the current climate of its government, using it as a gauge that blows gaskets weekly via twitter and with the weekly violence throughout North America against people of color, which indicates that there is nothing united about this continent. Appropriate is the poem of Maya Angelou speaks to the past and present conditions in North America in her poem, “These Yet to Be United States:”

Tremors of your network  
cause kings to disappear.  
Your open mouth in anger  
makes nations bow in fear.  
Your bombs can change the seasons,  
obliterate the spring.  
What more do you long for?  
Why are you suffering?  
You control the human lives  
in Rome and Timbuktu.  
Lonely nomads wandering  
owe Telstar to you.  
Seas shift at your bidding,  
your mushrooms fill the sky.  
Why are you unhappy?  
Why do your children cry?  
They kneel alone in terror

with dread in every glance.  
 Their nights ["rights"]? are threatened daily  
 by a grim inheritance.  
 You dwell in whitened castles  
 with deep and poisoned moats  
 and cannot hear the curses  
 which fill your children's throats.<sup>1</sup>

When pondering the thought about the title North America calls itself, it has not and does not live out nor up to its name. Why is this the case in a place that is so prideful to be called “the land of the free and the home of the brave?” America has an open secret, and the world knows all about it, but no human agent nor agency can bring North America to the justice that she needs to face. There is a High Court, which will judge North America for her atrocious overt actions and her audacious open secret.

The deity gave liberty to all men, and nature created no one a slave,” wrote Alkidamas, Aristotle’s rival in Athens. When Herodotus, the foremost historian of ancient Greece, traveled up the Nile River, he found the Nubians “the most handsome of peoples.” Lactantius, an advisor to Constantine I, the first Christian Roman emperor, announced early in the fourth century: “God who creates and inspires men wished them all to be fair, that is, equal.” St. Augustine, an African church father in the fourth and fifth centuries, maintained that “whoever is born anywhere as a human being, that is, as a rational mortal creature, however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or colour or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part or quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from the one man who was first created.”<sup>2</sup>

These principles of ideological thinking were not embraced nor embodied by those fleeing from England to steal North America.

In this New World, those who migrated from England or explored this new land and became settlers here had a need to develop and harvest the land. “However, these

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<sup>1</sup> Maya Angelou, “These Yet to be United States,” Genius, <https://genius.com/Maya-angelou-these-yet-to-be-united-states-annotated#note-2476416>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2016), 18.



antislavery and egalitarian champions did not accompany Aristotle and St. Paul into the modern era, into the new Harvard curriculum, or into the New England mind seeking to justify slavery and the racial hierarchy it produced.”<sup>3</sup> “From the very beginning of European exploits in the New World, Africans came as explores, servants and slaves. Even if Pedro Alonso Nino of Columbus crew was not a Negro as has been claimed, there were many blacks who accompanied other European explores to the New World. As early as 1501, Spain relinquished her earlier ban and permitted Africans to go to Spanish lands in the New World.”<sup>4</sup>

The first cheap labor force that was used was called “indentured servitude.”

But the first black immigrants (Anthony, Isabella, and the Jamestown group) were not slaves. This is a fact of capital importance in the history of the American Negro. They came, these first black men, the same way that many perhaps most, of the first white men came-under duress and pressure. They found a system (indentured servitude) which enable poor white men to come to America and sell their services for a stipulated number of years to planters. Under this system, thousands of whites-paupers, ne’er-do-wells, religious dissenters, waifs, prisoners, and prostitutes-were shipped to the colonies and sold to the highest bidder. Some were sold, as the first Negroes were sold, by the captains of ships. Some were kidnapped in the juggles of Africa. In Virginia, then, as in other colonies, the first Negro settlers fell into a well-established socio-economic groove which carried with it no racial inferiority. That came later. But in the interim, a period of forty years or more, the first Negroes accumulated land, voted, testified in court and mingled with whites on a basis of equality.<sup>5</sup>

This indentured servitude system did not have a dehumanizing element; it seems to have been a great demand for laborers to work the new land and the worker was compensated

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 27, 30; Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75, 79.

<sup>4</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 30.

<sup>5</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of the NEGRO in America, 1619-1962* (Hawthorne, CA: PN Publishing, 2017), 36.

for their work. The value system during this time appears to have been cordial and having a moral balance.

The planters of this new land would need a labor force to work the ground for a cheap wage, because the goal was profit.

Indentured servants first arrived in America in the decade following the settlement of Jamestown by the Virginia Company in 1607. The idea of indentured servitude was born from a need for cheap labor on this new land. The earliest settlers soon realized that they had lots of land to care for, but no one to care for it. So, with the passage to the Colonies being expensive for all but the wealthy, the Virginia Company developed the system of indentured servitude to attract workers, who mainly ended up being people of color. Indentured servants became vital to the colonial economy.<sup>6</sup>

From the beginning, the settlers (or planters) who would be the leaders in this New World have been solely focused on the economic growth of one group and to have a fixed cheap labor group.

This has been embedded and has been fed into our society from the beginning and it has been justified by a capitalistic view of Christianity by oppression, which is not Christianity at all. When the indentured servants who were the same hue as the settlers, became expensive because once they either escaped or fulfilled the service contract, then they were award a freedom package that included “...at least 25 acres of land, a year's worth of corn, arms, a cow and new clothes.”<sup>7</sup>

The answer to this expensive rising cost came across the Atlantic Oceans on ships in inhumane conditions because it was not about humanity nor morality; it was about a hunger for having more, greed, with little to no expense.

In 1619 the first documented black Africans were brought to Virginia as slaves, but with no slave laws in place, they were initially treated as indentured servants, and given the same opportunities for freedom dues as whites. However, enslave laws were soon passed – in Massachusetts in 1641 and Virginia in 1661 –and any small freedoms that might have existed for blacks were taken away. As demands

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<sup>6</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” Oregon Public Broadcasting, <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

<sup>7</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

for labor grew, so did the cost of indentured servants. Many landowners also felt threatened by newly freed servants demand for land. The colonial elite realized the problems of indentured servitude. Landowners turned to African slaves as a more profitable and ever-renewable source of labor and the shift from indentured servants to racial slavery had begun.<sup>8</sup>

Mainly the differences between majority of the first indentured servants and those from Africa, was their skin color and laws were passed to impose upon and oppress the Africans to remain as cheap labor for the settlers with no expiration date. This is considered the “Open Secret of America” and the laws from the seventeenth century America has systemically and systematically continued to dominate and influence North America’s judicial system then and now. Certainly, many advancements and strides have occurred; but those gains pale in comparison to the economically disadvantages that African Americans have repetitiously and systemically had obstacles placed in their path for perpetual economic oppression. The plight of the African who had been brought here by captors and not consider human, but this new land was driven by its capitalistic view of oppression cloaked by Christianity.

When John Cotton drafted New England’s first constitution in 1636, *Moses his judicials*, he legalized the enslavement of captives taken in just wars as well as “such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us.” The New England way imitated the Old England way on slavery. Cotton reproduced the policies of his British peers close and far away.<sup>9</sup> In 1636, Barbados officials announced that “Negroes and Indians that come here sold, should serve for Life, unless a Contract was before made to the

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<sup>8</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,”  
<https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

<sup>9</sup> Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning*, 18.

contrary.”<sup>10</sup> They write into law their “Open Secret,” and therein lies the codes and laws that have been and are still being enforced to a large degree to oppress and rule the African and others the settlers had enslaved then and now: “Slave Laws Passed in Virginia.”

Table 1: Slave laws passed in Virginia<sup>11</sup>

Date (s):	Event(s):
1639-1640	The general assembly of Virginia specifically excludes blacks from the requirement of possessing arms
1640-1660	The Critical Period: Custom to Law when status changed to “servant for life”
1642	Black women are deemed “tithe-able” (taxable) which created a distinction between African and English women
1662	Blacks face the possibility of life servitude. The General Assembly of Virginia decides that any child born to an enslaved woman will also be a slave.
1660-1680	Slave laws further restrict freedom of blacks and legalize different treatment for blacks and whites.
1667	Virginia lawmakers say baptism does not bring freedom to blacks. The statute is passed because some slaves used their status as a Christian in the 1640s and 1650s to argue for their freedom or for freedom for a child. Legislators also encourage slave owners to Christianize their enslaved men, women and children.
1668	Free black women, like enslaved females over the age of sixteen, are deemed tithable. The Virginia General Assembly says freedom does not exempt black women from taxation.
1669	An act about the “casual killing of slaves” says that if a slave dies while resisting his master, the act will not be presumed to have occurred with “premeditated malice.”
1670	Free blacks and Native Americans who had been baptized are forbidden to buy Christian servants.
1672	It becomes legal to wound or kill an enslaved person who resists arrest. Legislators also deem that the owner of any slave killed as he resisted arrest will receive financial compensation for the loss of an enslaved laborer. Legislators also offers a reward to Indians who capture escaped slaves and return them to a justice of the peace.

<sup>10</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1995), 157.

<sup>11</sup> Max Farrand, ed., *The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929).

1680-1705	Slave laws reflect racism and the deliberate separation of blacks and whites. Color becomes the determining factor. Conscious efforts to rigidly police slave conduct.
1680	<p>Virginia's General Assembly restricts the ability of slaves to meet at gatherings, including funerals. It becomes legal for a white person or person to kill an escaped slave who resists capture. Slaves also are forbidden to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arm themselves for either offensive or defensive purposes. Punishment: 20 lashes on one's bare back.</li> <li>• leave the plantation without the written permission of one's master, mistress or overseer. Punishment: 20 lashes on one's bare back.</li> <li>• "...lift up his hand against any Christian." Punishment: 30 lashes on one's bare back.</li> </ul>
1691	<p>Any white person married to a black or mulatto is banished and a systematic plan is established to capture "outlying slaves." If an outlying slave is killed while resisting capture, the owner receives financial compensation for the laborer. Partners in an interracial marriage cannot stay in the colony for more than three months after they married.</p> <p>A fine of fifteen pounds sterling is levied on an English woman who gives birth to a mulatto child. The fine is to be paid within a month of the child's birth. If a woman cannot pay the fine, she is to serve five years as an indentured servant. If the mother is an indentured servant, she faces an additional five years of servitude after the completion of her indenture. A mulatto child born to a white indentured servant will serve a thirty-year indenture. A master must transport an emancipated slave out of Virginia within six months of receiving his or her freedom.</p>
1692	Slaves are denied the right to a jury trial for capital offenses. A minimum of four justices of the peace hear evidence and determine the fate of the accused. Legislators also decide that enslaved individuals are not permitted to own horses, cattle and hogs after December 31 of that year.
1705	<p>Free men of color lose the right to hold public office.</p> <p>Blacks — free and enslaved — are denied the right to testify as witnesses in court cases.</p> <p>All black, mulatto, and Indian slaves are considered real property.</p> <p>Enslaved men are not allowed to serve in the militia.</p> <p>In an act concerning servants and slaves, Virginia's lawmakers:</p> <p>Increase the indenture of a mulatto child born to a white woman to thirty-one-years.</p>

From 1660 to 1680, slave laws further restricted freedom of blacks and legalized different treatment for blacks and whites. The slave laws were to keep the African slaves and their descendants in slavery for perpetuity, whether they were Christians or not.

Christians did not embrace the love thy neighbor as thy self, this only applied to those who missed the kiss of nature's sun.<sup>12</sup>

In 1669, the Virginia legislature, by passing the following statute, notified slave owners that they would not be criminally prosecuted for the "casual killing of slaves." This 1669 statute indicated that Virginia was prepared to exploit the slave labor force to the maximum degrees possible. Virginians revealed that they were prepared to beat, mutilate, and even kill slaves in order to extract profits from their plantations.<sup>13</sup>

Free blacks and Native Americans who had been baptized are forbidden to buy Christian servants.

In fact, a slave baptism was often seen as a sign of his docility. Eventually some ministers began to use even Christianity as a means of extorting obedience from their slaves. In his sermon to a Maryland slave congregation, Reverend Thomas Bacon stressed that slaves who desired to be good Christians could become so only by being "good slaves:" "And pray, do not think that I want to deceive you, when I tell you, that your masters and mistresses are God's overseers, - and that if you are faulty towards them, God himself will punish you severely for it in the next world, unless you repent and strive to make amends, by your faithfulness and Diligence."<sup>14</sup>

In 1670, three years after the assembly had made clear that baptism would not alter a black man's bondage, it passed an act further clarifying the black servants' status. The clarification in the colony was made by dividing non-Christian servants into two classes: those imported into this colony by shipping, who "shall be slaves for their lives;" and those who "shall come by land" who "shall serve, if boys or girls; until thirty years of age: if men or women twelve years or no longer. This act favored the Indian, who usually came by land, and fixed the status of the non-Christian African as that of slave for life." This systemic form of deconstruction was placed at every juncture of the Africans plight in this North American continent.<sup>15</sup>

A fine of fifteen pounds of sterling is levied on an English woman who gives birth to a mulatto child. The fine is to be paid within a month of the child's birth. If a woman cannot pay the fine, she is to serve five years as an indentured servant. If

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<sup>12</sup> Farrand, *The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts*.

<sup>13</sup> A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color, Race and the American Legal Process* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color*, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color*, 37.

the mother is an indentured servant, she faces an additional five years of servitude after the completion of her indenture. A mulatto child born to a white indentured servant will serve a thirty-year indenture. A master must transport an emancipated slave out of Virginia within six months of receiving his or her freedom. Increase the indenture of a mulatto child born to a white woman to thirty-one years. Determine that if a white man or white woman marries a black partner, the white individual will be sent to jail for six months and fined ten pounds current money of Virginia. Determine that any minister who marries an interracial couple will be assessed a fine of 10,000 pounds of tobacco. Determine that any escaped slave who is unwilling or unable to name his or her owner will be sent to the public jail.<sup>16</sup>

Virginia's codes and laws set the stage and standards for how enslaved Africans and others would be oppressed in this New World without an expiration date. "Why of all the multitudinous groups in this country [do] you have to single out Negroes and given them this separate treatment."<sup>17</sup> The standards of this new land were being built upon quotas not equality, slavery not freedom, but promotes these ideas in patriotic songs.

The code, which would also serve as a model for other colonies, went even further. The law imposed harsh physical punishments, since enslaved persons who did not own property could not be required to pay fines. It stated that slaves needed written permission to leave their plantation, that slaves found guilty of murder or rape would be hanged, that for robbing or any other major offence, the slave would receive sixty lashes and be placed in stocks, where his or her ears would be cut off, and that for minor offences, such as associating with whites, slaves would be whipped, branded, or maimed.<sup>18</sup>

This is the systemic structure that has been in place since the establishment of this New World and has proliferated throughout the centuries and into today's government. The laws that society is governed by are those laws that have been governing people of color through the lens of seventeenth century laws and views, but we are supposedly founded

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<sup>16</sup> History.com, "Fugitive Slave Acts," A and E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fugitive-slave-act>.

<sup>17</sup> Thurgood Marshall, oral argument before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483 (1954).

<sup>18</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, "Virginia Slave Codes," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p268.html>.

upon Christianity, the Open Secret of America. Will this continue without no expiration date?

Where slavery was growing, as in the lower South in the late eighteen and early nineteenth centuries, new and more stringent laws were enacted. All over the South, however, there emerge a body of laws generally regarded as the Slave Codes, which covered every aspect of the life of the slave. There were variations from state to state, but the general point of view laws should protect the ownership of such property and should also protect whites against any dangers that might arise from the presence of large numbers of slaves. It was also felt that slaves should be maintained in a position of due subordination in order that optimum of discipline and work could be achieved.<sup>19</sup>

When will change come? In the early nineteenth century there was the Abolitionist Movement.

The Abolitionist movement in the United States of America was an effort to end slavery in a nation that valued personal freedom and believed “all men are created equal.” Over time, abolitionists grew more strident in their demands, and slave owners entrenched in response, fueling regional divisiveness that ultimately led to the American Civil War.<sup>20</sup>

God was at work in the hearts of the Africans, even though the settlers did not consider them to even be three-fifths human, God was at work.

Some of the leaders of the Abolitionist Movement were William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and William Lloyd Still. These men and women sacrificed their lives for a human rights cause, they were acting out the radical nature of Jesus ministry, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk. 4:18). There was no emancipation

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<sup>19</sup> Franklin and Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> HistoryNet, “Abolitionist Movement,” HistoryNet LLC, <https://www.historynet.com/abolitionist-movement>.



coming from the oppressor's form of Christianity, but an authentic emancipation was coming from a people with a heart for God and a love for humanity.

By stressing the moral imperative to end sinful practices and each person's responsibility to uphold God's will in society, preachers like Lyman Beecher, Nathaniel Taylor, and Charles G. Finney in what came to be called the Second Great Awakening led massive religious revivals in the 1820s that gave a major impetus to the later emergence of abolitionism as well as to such other reforming crusades as temperance, pacifism, and women's rights. By the early 1830s, Theodore D. Weld, William Lloyd Garrison, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and Elizur Wright, Jr., all spiritually nourished by revivalism, had taken up the cause of "immediate emancipation."<sup>21</sup>

This spiritual revival fueled the Abolitionist Movement and God was working through them to emancipate and liberate the oppressed and enslaved humanity. This soul stirring that was moving in the heart of Frederick Douglass was speaking truth to power which was the hypocrisy of the Capitalistic Imperialistic Colonized form of Christianity that white's parade to enslaved Africans. This is Frederick Douglass view of American Christianity:

I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show, together with the horrible inconsistencies, which every where [sic] surround me. We have menstealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunders for church members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus. The man who robs me of my earnings at the end of the each week meets me as a class-leader on Sunday morning, to show me the way of life, and the path of salvation. He who sells my sister, for purposes of prostitution, stands forth as the pious advocate of purity. He who proclaims it a religious duty to read the Bible denies me the right of learning to read the name of the God who made me. He who is religious advocate of marriage robs whole millions of its sacred influence and leaves them to the ravages of wholesale pollution. The warm defender of the sacredness of the family relation is the same that scatters whole families-sundering husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers, leaving the hut vacant, and the hearth desolate. We see the thief preaching against theft, and the adulterer against adultery. We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support the gospel, and babes sold to purchase Bibles for the poor heathens! All for the glory of God and the good of souls! The slave auctioneer's bell and the church-going bell chime in with each

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<sup>21</sup> HistoryNet, "Abolitionist Movement," <https://www.historynet.com/abolitionist-movement>.

other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master. Revivals of religion and revivals in the slave-trade go hand in hand together. The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time. The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity. Here we have religion and robbery the allies of each other-devils dressed in angels' robes, and hell presenting the semblance of paradise.<sup>22</sup>

Here is, the Open Secret of America, she has a cardiac issue. The white settlers deceived, stole and swindled all that was not theirs and this mode of operation is still in practice today. In the DNA of this country is the god of greed, capitalism which blinds the judgement of all who have governed in this land since the takeover of North America. This is not a nation under God, it is a nation governed by greed. This cardiac issue was at a boiling point because Southern states did not want to lose their power to enslave humans although the Virginia Slave Law Codes consider them property of their owners. Thus, the lapse of a moral and Christian character caused the Northern states to go to war with the Southern states mainly over the idea of slavery.

A common explanation is that the Civil War was fought over the moral issue of slavery. In fact, it was the economics of slavery and political control of that system that was central to the conflict. A key issue was states' rights. The Southern states wanted to assert their authority over the federal government so they could abolish federal laws they didn't support, especially laws interfering with the South's right to keep slaves and take them wherever they wished. Meanwhile, the newly formed Republican party, whose members were strongly opposed to the westward expansion of slavery into new states, was gaining prominence. The election of a Republican, Abraham Lincoln, as President in 1860 sealed the deal and his victory, without a single Southern electoral vote, was a clear signal to the Southern states that they had lost all influence. Feeling excluded from the political system, they turned to the only alternative they believed was left to them: secession, a political decision that led directly to war.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, electronic ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1999), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>.

<sup>23</sup> HistoryNet, "Abolitionist Movement," <https://www.historynet.com/abolitionist-movement>.

The Open Secret of America is that although the sixteenth president rolled out the abolishment of this inhumane system that the country was built upon, she will not openly confess and repent of her sin. Instead, she continues to act in overt and covert ways with blinded vision of the continued manifestation of the capitalistic imperialistic colonizes form of Christianity she was founded upon.

But the church of this country is not only indifferent to the wrongs of the slave, it actually takes sides with the oppressors. It has made itself the bulwark of American slavery, and the shield of American slave-hunters. Many of its most eloquent Divines, who stand as the very lights of the church, have shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained of God; that to send back an escaped bondman to his master is clearly the duty of all the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world for Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

“The American church is guilty, when viewed in connection with what it is doing to uphold slavery; but it is superlatively guilty when viewed in its connection with its ability to abolish slavery.”<sup>25</sup> This emancipation was needed and necessary to stop the inhumane sentence without a termination date, but the emancipation did not resolve the inhumane psychological health, nor restore or provide the economic revenue or return of the oppressed for what the oppressor had robbed them of for centuries.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, shortly after Lincoln’s inauguration as America’s 16th president, he maintained that the war was about restoring the Union and not about slavery. He avoided issuing an anti-slavery proclamation immediately, despite the urgings of abolitionists and radical Republicans, as well as his personal belief that slavery was morally repugnant. Instead, Lincoln chose to move cautiously until he could gain wide support from the public for such a measure. In July 1862, Lincoln informed his cabinet that he would issue an emancipation proclamation but that it would exempt the so-called border states, which had slaveholders but remained loyal to the Union. His cabinet persuaded

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 3, no. 5 (December 2009): 14.

<sup>25</sup> Douglass, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 15.

him not to make the announcement until after a Union victory. Lincoln's opportunity came following the Union win at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862. On September 22, the president announced that slaves in areas still in rebellion within 100 days would be free. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation, which declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebel states "are, and henceforward shall be free."<sup>26</sup>

Freed to go where and to do what? When families have been torn apart and babies taken from their mother's bosom; and the fathers have been emasculated in front of their women and children. And now they are deemed as free? Texas did not learn of this Emancipation Proclamation until June 19, 1865, so now that enslaved people are free, they still must go work for the one who abused, mistreated, raped, and whipped them. They can only do what they had been doing as enslaved people and what power did, they possess to bargain for a few days wage? Who would hear the case of a freed slave's complaint against possibly his former owner or his kind? In the book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, DeGruy calls the emancipation of enslaved people The Illusion of Freedom:

They were finally going to be able to reap the benefits of their own ingenuity, prosper from their own labor and share the fruits of American society. Hope regained. For a moment. Shortly after slavery ended, states rushed to enact laws to continue to subjugation of African Americans. At the same time, vigilante groups formed to ensure that blacks learned their place in the 'new' South. Yes, slavery was over and highly-regarded men like Sims and his peers no longer had free and unlimited access to African American women and children, but the beatings, murders and psychological abuse continued.<sup>27</sup>

Now that the Northern states won the Civil War, a new era was beginning to blossom for those who were freed and North America experiencing shift, but it would not and has not

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<sup>26</sup> History.com, "Lincoln Issues the Emancipation Proclamation," A and E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lincoln-issues-emancipation-proclamation>.

<sup>27</sup> Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publishing, Inc., 2005), 80.

released the continued psychological and systemic intimidation tactics on formerly enslaved people. This new era on the horizon was called the Reconstruction Period. The Northern states, abolitionist and radical republicans would not allow President Andrew Jackson to readmit the Southern states who held slaves to welcome back into the Union without some strict changes in their state laws.

Freed enslaved people during the Reconstruction Period were going to live in North America under some new laws that the Southern states would have to abide by if they were going to be readmitted into the Union. During this Reconstruction Period, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and Andrew Johnson was left with the role of implementing and readmitting the Southern states back into the Union. He was President during the implementation period of Amendments Thirteen and Fourteen.

The first of two Amendments to the Constitution was the Thirteenth Amendment which states, “The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1865 in the aftermath of the Civil War, abolished slavery in the United States. The 13th Amendment states, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”<sup>28</sup> This amendment may have abolished the institution and the practice of slavery the way in which North America was built; but it did not remove the systemic construct from the governing powers of North America. The same governing body that wrote the amendment had no authority to keep them accountable to enforce it and punish those who would not abide by it. This provide a little

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<sup>28</sup> History.com, “13th Amendment,” A and E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/thirteenth-amendment>.

hope to the enslaved Africans who now have been freed in this foreign land and with no means to return home and no ownership of anything.

The Fourteenth Amendment tries to further the freedom cause for the enslavement system of North America it says,

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States—including former slaves—and guaranteed all citizens “equal protection of the laws.” One of three amendments passed during the Reconstruction era to abolish slavery and establish civil and legal rights for black Americans, it would become the basis for many landmark Supreme Court decisions over the years.<sup>29</sup>

This equal citizenship under the law for the freed enslaved African did not mean much when the majority of officers in the governing and judicial system have in some way directly or indirectly benefited from the sacrifice and sorrows of the enslaved Africans who built this country. The governing body still has not repented. The laws that govern this land have no teeth because the people overseeing them have callus and cold heart. Therefore, North America is governed by an unethical, immoral, anemic cardiac system.

The Fifteenth Amendment provided the freed enslaved Africans the opportunity to participate in the election process, but this was not without systematic intimidation or treats to the lives and safety of these freed enslaved Africans. “The 15th Amendment states: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> History.com, “14th Amendment,” A and E Television Networks, LLC, [https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fourteenth-amendment#section\\_2](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fourteenth-amendment#section_2).

<sup>30</sup> History.com, “15th Amendment,” A and E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment>.

One of the leading black voices in this Reconstruction Period in the South was Booker T. Washington who was born during slavery.

Born a slave on a small farm in the Virginia backcountry, he moved with his family after emancipation to work in the salt furnaces and coal mines of West Virginia. After a secondary education at Hampton Institute, he taught an upgraded school and experimented briefly with the study of law and the ministry, but a teaching position at Hampton decided his future career. In 1881 he founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute on the Hampton model in the Black Belt of Alabama.<sup>31</sup>

“In 1895, Booker T. Washington publicly put forth his philosophy on race relations in a speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, known as the "Atlanta Compromise." In his speech, Washington stated that African Americans should accept disenfranchisement and social segregation as long as whites allow them economic progress, educational opportunity and justice in the courts.”<sup>32</sup> What Booker T. Washington believed and built in Tuskegee was also being accomplished in Tulsa, Oklahoma in an area where freed blacks had settled called Greenwood. Washington visited Greenwood in 1905.

Downtown Greenwood was the center of African American life in Tulsa, and one of the first sections of the city that sold to African American settlers. The successful community including several groceries, two independent newspapers, two movie theaters, nightclubs, dozens of businesses, and numerous churches. The thriving community led Booker T. Washington to call Greenwood, “The Negro’s Wall Street” and the moniker stuck.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Documenting the South, “Booker T. Washington,” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/washington/bio.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Biography.com, “Booker T. Washington,” A and E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.biography.com/activist/booker-t-washington>.

<sup>33</sup> National Museum of African American History and Culture, “The Deadliest Racial Massacre in U.S.,” American History through an African American Lens, <https://nmaahc.tumblr.com/post/161275889928/tulsa-riots-the-deadliest-racial-massacre-in-us/amp>.

This settlement of freed enslaved Africans, Negro, Blacks have found a place that would sell property to them and they begin to carve out their place in North America.

After the Civil War, most of the all-black townships that had been established in the United States were located in Indian and Oklahoma Territories. One of those townships, Greenwood, was created in 1906 by one of Tulsa's earliest pioneers, O.W. Gurley, who had come from Arkansas to Oklahoma in the 1889 Land Rush. A black educator and entrepreneur who gained wealth by speculating in land, Gurley purchased forty acres on the northern outskirts of Tulsa, which itself had been incorporated only eight years earlier in 1898. Gurley sold his land to African Americans who soon developed a small community. Tulsa grew rapidly because of the oil boom in the surrounding countryside and by 1910 annexed Greenwood.<sup>34</sup>

With the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in place freed enslaved people still had a systemic structure that had not been deconstructed during the Reconstruction Period. It was the ethical and moral jaded view of not considering the African as human nor having equity in a land that they built nor justice to advocate and administrate their cause and interest.

The denials and limitations within the big corporations and institutions, such as the NYSE, because of racism and segregation, led many ambitious but realistic African Americans in the early twentieth century to build thriving businesses within their own communities. This philosophy sparked one of the greatest successes of this period among people of color. Strangely, this explosion of capitalism developed miles away from lower Manhattan in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This site was home of the development that would later be known as the Negro Wall Street. Although the town had nothing to do with New York's Wall Street, the label described the tremendous growth and development of business within the 35-block radius known as the Greenwood District. Like many regions throughout America in the early 1900s, Tulsa was divided by segregation; while some areas were hindered from substantial economic development by these Jim Crow policies, others were not. Still other communities drew from their own talents and resources to create and build thriving businesses within their boundaries and Tulsa led this movement.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alexis Clark, "Tulsa's 'Black Wall Street' Flourished as a Self-Contained Hub in Early 1900s," History.com, <http://www.history.com/news/black-wall-street-tulsa-race-massacre>.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, "Tulsa's 'Black Wall Street,'" <http://www.history.com/news/black-wall-street-tulsa-race-massacre>.



The main impetus of the enslavement of Africans and the Transatlantic Slave Trade had to do with economics and the restriction of freed Africans to obtain independent economic stability and equitable justice. The systemic structure continues to deconstruct or dilute pure constructs of freed enslaved Africans through the lack of economics and equity in justice then and now.

Other black communities spent their dollars at white businesses, despite being viewed as inferior. In contrast, the people of Tulsa realized the power of ownership, as a result, black shop-owners provided all the needed services to cater to black community, all monies and investments stayed within the community and it blossomed. In that 35-block span, there were 1,500 black-owned businesses and houses, including 10 millionaires and many families with substantial savings.<sup>36</sup>

This construction of black wealth and pride was occurring during the period of Reconstruction, now the black church began to have an important role in the life of construction.

The economic role of black churches gained impetus in the twentieth century, under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, who was widely regarded as the national Negro leader of his time, a role which Frederick Douglass had assumed during latter years of abolitionism and the Civil War years. Both men were deeply religious, closely tied to churches and they often functioned as unofficial preachers. Although Booker T. Washington was a complex and shrewd man with conservative political views, he also espoused radical solidarity and saw group economic unity – or “Negro support of Negro business” – as the only path toward economic progress and uplift for a largely rural and destitute people. The gospel of wealth that Washington preached espoused the major values of the Protestant ethic: thrift, industry, and self-help. He felt that “economic accumulation” and the “cultivation of morality” were the major means of black acceptance in American society. By demonstrating their worth through frugality, hard work, and achievement, the African America’s economic progress would lead to social equality and political rights; Washington eschewed political protests and did not press for the franchise. His views on economics represented a microcosm of the opinions of many black church leaders.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Clark, “Tulsa’s ‘Black Wall Street,’” <http://www.history.com/news/black-wall-street-tulsa-race-massacre>.

<sup>37</sup> C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 247.

Greenwood is an example during this Reconstruction Period. This is a picture of hope that should continue to thrive during and after the Reconstruction Period, but the embedded nature of the systemic structure will not allow freed enslaved Africans and their descendants to thrive because of their loss of economic privilege and status.

Greenwood was a model for what ambition, excellence and intellect of the freed enslaved Africans and their descendants could achieve with unhindered opportunities that North America allows for others who seek the American Dream, but not those of African diaspora and that have built this country to what they enjoy and rule over.

If North America ever desires or dreams to become the United States of America and to live out that Constitution and Creeds, that she is so proud of, she must be willing to expose and express herself by confession of past and present inequities and injustices. She must be willing to critical critique her laws, policies, and practices, by implementing cleansings of the oppression of truth. She must be willing to implement systematic deconstruction approaches to the systemic structure that governs us today with the same prejudices that has governed since the African Diaspora and the creation of the Virginia Slave Codes.

Greenwood is a model of what descendants of enslaved Africans have the capacity to achieve, but also it is a picture of excellence and genius that they have been robbed for centuries because of the hidden and hushed voice of ancestors. This capitalistic society continues to rob the descendant of enslaved Africans of their genius, so their wealth grows. North America is not a Christian nation because those in power have used the Bible to construct a systemic oppressive system to marginalize many. These actions are a sharp and distinct contradiction to the liberator's manta because, "The Spirit of the Lord

is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). We must be about lifting all humanity, not a select or specific group in this land of North America and around the world.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The theological foundations of this project focus on the progressive movement of the systematic theory of liberation theology into black liberation theology. Liberation theology seeks to empower and uplift those who have been left out, looked over and initially marginalized. This theology connects with what struggle and suffering is for those who are oppressed and seeks to deconstruct the hypocrisy of western Christianity, that has been the catalyst in oppression of people of color. This project seeks to address the deconstructive behaviors and beliefs that causes and creates a deconstructive community and environment.

The conglomerate of parts humanity acknowledges and avails self to are God, God's Word, humanity, sin, and world systems. There is another system theory at work in this country that has been from the founding of this country and still exists is oppression towards Native Americans, enslaved Africans and other minority groups. This oppressive systems theory perpetuates and protects the privileges and rights of a few while oppressing the masses for their place of superiority. Systems theory is the study of society as a complex arrangement of elements, including individuals and their beliefs, as they relate to a whole. Structural differentiation refers to the adaptation of society to its environment through changes in its internal complexity. An important aspect of social

differentiation is the way in which adaptation occurs, or how changes in the structure of the system relate to the process of the system.<sup>1</sup>

Though it has roots in the pre-Civil War black church which recognized that racism and Christianity were opposites, “black theology” is a phenomenon of the 1960s. One way of describing it is to say that it is religious counterpart of the more secular movement called “black power.” This means that black theology is a religious explication of black people’s need to define the scope and meaning of black existence in a white racist society. The black existential mood that express itself in black power and black theology stems from the recognition that black identity must be defined in terms of its African heritage rather than in terms of European enslavement.<sup>2</sup>

The heart of Cone’s work has centered on the political and structural manifestations of White racism as demonic. If Jesus Christ calls the oppressed African American community to fight for its liberation, then this faith gathering must wage a battle to deconstruct white supremacist power relations. There can be no participation in God’s liberation movement on earth if poor Black folk do not achieve their liberation from visible evil systems created and perpetuated by principalities and powers with White faces.<sup>3</sup>

The enslaved Africans taken from their land and lifestyle, beaten and treated like disposable commodities then placed in an oppressive systematic structure of life that never allowed for them to universally rise up and unite. This systemic structure would always protect white privilege and oppress the descendance of enslaved Africans. They control it all through the law of this land that has not changed nor is colorblind in its justice to free the descendance of enslaved Africans since the Slave Codes of 1640.

The disinherited experience the disintegrating effect of contempt in some such fashion as did Goliath. There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person. That threat of violence is ever present, and there is no way to determine precisely when it may come crushing down upon you. In modern power politics this is called a war of nerves. The underprivileged in any

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Gibson, “Systems Theory,” Britannica, [Britannica.com/topic/systems-theory](http://Britannica.com/topic/systems-theory).

<sup>2</sup> James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, 1966-1979 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 106.

<sup>3</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 61.

society are the victims of the perpetual war of nerves. The logic of the state of affairs is physical violence, but it need not fulfill itself in order to work its perfect havoc in the souls of the poor.<sup>4</sup>

The modifications to the laws of this land since 1640 have never favored enslaved Africans nor their descendants only modified to seemingly reconstruct new boundaries for the times to maintain white power and white privilege in place. Carter G. Woodson says,

We must bear in mind that the Negro has never been educated. He has merely been informed about other things which he has not been permitted to do. The Negroes have been shoved out of the regular schools through the rear door into the obscurity of the backyard and told to imitate others whom they see from afar, or they have been permitted in some places to come into the public schools to see how others educate themselves.<sup>5</sup>

African American and other liberation theologians from all over the world emphasized inherent human dignity and its diminishment through structures and systems of oppression, degradation, and marginalization. They argue that the struggles against oppression and for liberation is religious as well as sociopolitical. This struggle is for “full humanity” both demonstrates and restores human dignity, not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressor whose humanity is diminished by participation in and collusion with domination. The struggle for liberation also embodies and enacts God’s saving purpose in and beyond history.<sup>6</sup>

“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded for by the oppressed.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 93.

<sup>6</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1970), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” April 13, 1963, Web CN, [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter\\_birmingham\\_jail.pdf](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter_birmingham_jail.pdf).

“Douglass summarizes the influence of slavery upon the slaveholders by saying that “slavery can change a saint into a sinner, and an angel into a demon.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Douglass maintained that slavery had a corrosive influence upon the “character” and general well-being of the slaveowner and the whole slaveholding community, and that therefore the British could be appealed to “as strongly by their regard for the slaveholder as for the slave, to labor in this cause.”<sup>9</sup> Here is an implicit distinction between the apparent self-interest of the slaveholder and the real self-interest of the slaveholder which allowed Douglass to maintain that it was genuinely in the best interest of the slaveholder that slavery be abolished. One might add also that another corrosive influence upon the character of the oppressor is the kind of self-deception into which an oppressor is driven in order to maintain his or her self-image. “One has only to examine statements by slaveholders to the effect that their activity was for the purpose of Christianizing Africans who would otherwise spend eternity in hell to see the tortuous self-deceptions to which the slaveholders were subject.”<sup>10</sup>

Humanity’s greed for domination and power over others has demonized the beauty of what God’s creation was and should be by its bullying attitude and domination practices toward the world, by promoting capitalistic, conceded, and closed-minded view of this western form of Christianity.

If two men equally matched, or even relatedly matched, are in deadly combat, the violence is clear-cut though terrible; there is gross equality of advantage. But when power and tools of violence are on one side, the fact that there is no available and recognized protection from violence makes the resulting fear deeply

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<sup>8</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, NY: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 417.

<sup>10</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 42-43.

terrifying. In a society in which certain people or groups – by virtue of economic, social, or political power – have dead-weight advantages over others who are essentially without that kind of power, those who are thus disadvantaged know that they cannot fight back effectively, that they cannot protect themselves, and that they cannot demand protection from their persecutors. Any slight conflict, any alleged insult, in vague whim, any unrelated frustration, may bring down upon the head of the defenseless the full weight of naked physical violence. Even in such circumstances it is not the fear of death that is most often at work; it is deep humiliation arising from dying without benefit of cause or purpose. No high end is served. There is no trumpet blast to stir the blood and anesthetize the agony. Here there is no going down to the grave with a shout; it is merely being killed or beaten in utter wrath or indifferent sadism, without the dignity of being on the receiving end of a premeditated act hammered out in the white heat of a transcendent moral passion. The whole experience attacks the fundamental sense of self-respect and person dignity, without which a man is no man.<sup>11</sup>

In this environment and societal system was the enslaved African and their descendants.

They have been thrust into and made to think and believe that God and the oppressor's view of this God was correct. Out of this oppression and cruel subjugation is born the voice and cries of oppressed people to a God who will deliver with a mighty and just hand. Further, God will deal justly and righteously with the oppressor.

The oppressed people seeking liberation that comes from a biblical view of Jesus as Liberator, not this cosmetic European painting of Jesus that does not accurately display the features of the resurrected Jesus of Revelation chapter one. This systemic religion and theological view of western capitalistic imperialistic colonizing form of Christianity that has been perpetuated and passed on to enslaved Africans and their descendants as the white savior.

Biblical history, through events of liberation such as the exodus, confirms that God acts on behalf of the oppressed. God has shown such intervention in black history by providing hope for continued works of liberation. A focal point of God's historical liberating activity was and is the black church. The black church was not only the place where these oppressed people could be affirmed in the personal worth, but there they also heard stories and sermons about the Lord who was always at work. They could be strengthened through the personal sharing of

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<sup>11</sup> Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 27-28.



those who would say,” God is a heart-fixer and a mind regulator. He is the One who binds the broken heart and eases the pain of the afflicted. He rescued me from the gates of hell and restored y soul to his bosom.<sup>12</sup>

In the Bible likewise, we are told what man is. That he was at first made holy, in the image of God, that he fell from that state of holiness and became an enemy to God, and that since the fall, all imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are evil, and only evil and that continually. That the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. And that all mankind was under the wrath and curse of God and must have been forever miserable if they had been left to suffer what their sins deserved.<sup>13</sup>

The God, who created all things and because of Him all things exist, being held together by Him and not humanity has revealed His love toward us in Jesus Christ.

Theology, however, deals with the nature of humanity in relation to its ultimate origin, meaning, and destiny, that is, in relation to God, and not just its phenomenal structure as organic and psychic being. Therefore, the revelation of God and not the human sciences are decisive for the doctrine of humanity. Only when God is revealed as Lord, creator, and savior do we know that we are creatures, sinners, and redeemed. Apart from God’s revelation attested in the Bible, we usually understand ourselves as essentially identified with nature (naturalism), or the divine (idealism), or as an unstable mixture of the natural and the divine (Platonism). Apart from revelation, we may be aware that we are embedded in nature, but we may interpret this as a fall, an unfortunate accident, or an illusion. In revelation we know it as our creaturehood. Apart from revelation, we may experience that all is not well with us, that we are unfulfilled, but in revelation we know this as sin.<sup>14</sup>

God proves his love for humanity in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8 NRSV).

Liberation means the act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression, released. Liberation demands that an individual has a sacrificial and servant’s

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> Jupiter Hammon, “An Address to the Negroes,” in *Sondra O’Neale, Jupiter Hammon and the Biblical Beginnings of African-American Literature* (Metuchen, NJ: American Library Association, 1993), 238.

<sup>14</sup> Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 135.

heart fueled by compassion with the desire to see a different reality for oppressed people, through restoration and reviving what has been lost or taking away. Liberation exists in the African American experience but is universal in coverage to all humanity. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”<sup>15</sup> One of the leading pioneers of liberation theology is Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest. Gustavo, Leonardo Boff of Brazil, Jon Sobrino of Spain and Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay, in the 1950s and 1960s sought to address the moral thermostat on poverty and social injustice in their region. They coined a phrase that became popular “preferential option for the poor.” Liberation theology could be interpreted as an attempt to return to the gospel of the early church where Christianity is politically and culturally decentralized.<sup>16</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez gave the movement its name with his 1971 book, *A Theology of Liberation*.<sup>17</sup> In this book:

Gutiérrez combined populist ideas with the social teachings of the Catholic Church. He was influenced by an existing socialist current in the Church which included organizations such as the Catholic Worker Movement and the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*, a Belgian Christian youth worker organization. He was also influenced by Paul Gauthier's *The Poor, Jesus and the Church* (1965). Gutiérrez's book is based on an understanding of history in which the human being is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for human destiny, and yet Christ the Saviour liberates the human race from sin, which is the root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> King Jr., “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” [http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter\\_birmingham\\_jail.pdf](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/letter_birmingham_jail.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Wikipedia, “Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI Promulgated on March 26, 1967,” Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populorum\\_progressio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populorum_progressio).

<sup>17</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la Liberación: Perspectivas* (Lima, Perú: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1974), 36f.

When one considers the teaching of Christ and how Christ responds to those who will be welcomed into the kingdom, one must see those Christ truly helped with a heart of compassion not a handout of hinderance. Then the king will say to those at his right hand:

‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matt. 25:34-40 NRSV).

Drawing from the biblical motif on the poor, Gutiérrez asserts that God is revealed as preferring those people who are “insignificant,” “marginalized,” “unimportant,” “needy,” “despised,” and “defenseless.” Moreover, he makes clear that terminology of “the poor” in scripture has social and economic connotations that etymologically go back to the Greek word, *ptōchos*.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, as to not misinterpret Gutiérrez’s definition of the term “preferential option,” he stresses, “Preference implies the universality of God’s love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, ‘what comes first.’”<sup>20</sup>

Liberation theology in its explanation according to Gustavo Gutierrez, he expressed the “Chalcedonian principle.”

In A Theology of Liberation, he speaks instead of three reciprocally interpenetrating levels of meaning. So, liberation expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy

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<sup>19</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 112.

<sup>20</sup> James B. Nickoloff, ed., *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 145.

nations and oppressive classes. At a deeper level, liberation can be applied to an understanding of history. Humankind is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for its own destiny. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new humanity and a qualitatively different society. Finally, the word liberation [leads] to the Biblical sources which inspire the presence and action of humankind in history. In the Bible, Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Saviour liberates from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes humankind truly free, that is to say, he enables us to live in communion with him. It is very important to allow the tension which this "chalcedonian principle" generates to remain unresolved. Otherwise, there is a tendency to ignore one or the other level, and whereas it is the saving power of Christ which gives defining sense to the other two, the liberation which Christ brings is not something without historical and political consequences.<sup>21</sup>

When one considers liberation brought to humanity by Jesus the Christ, we see a political and social move of liberation. Jesus' ministry and mission to "seek and to save the lost," was ministry to the looked over and the left-out ones. To give dignity and speak hope to those who the religious rite of His day considered unworthy to be among the pious people and the Romans, who oppressed and ruled the land. Jesus was a welcome breath of fresh air. He spoke up for the voiceless and gave victory to those who believed in Him. Jesus presented a present-day hope and was evidence for those who doubted Him.

The religious and pious people were not pleased with Jesus, just as today people in power are not pleased with liberation practices. Those who love the Bible, that do not make it all about Christ and the ministry of His mandate to set the captives free, give the gospel an antiseptic that makes ministry of Jesus about power and position over people. The ministry of Jesus was about people, liberating and transforming everyone who He encountered. His presence on earth has experienced the power of restoration of God's divine reality of human dignity and value. The liberation and restoration are for all

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<sup>21</sup> Tim Noble, "Gutierrez, Gustavo, 1928: Liberation Theology," *Communio Viatorum* 43, no. 1 (2001): 10-11.

humanity, so until the least of us are equally valued as the more privileged, we must continue the work of Christ for all humanity so that we all live equitably and in peace with God and our neighbor.

Despite what enslaved Africans have endured in the cruelty of conditions and treatment, God has been the guiding light through every obstacle in our journey. The enslaved Africans had a soul and spiritual connection to God but it was not the western capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity. “In one sense black theology is as old ...as the first [African’s refusal] to accept slavery as consistent with religion.”<sup>22</sup>

With resistance on the part of slavers and slaves, slow Christianization of slaves was in process by the late seventeenth century. Slaves were proselytized by missionaries who were aided by laws that saw no incompatibility between Christianity and slavery. During the course of two great revivals – the Great Awakenings – black and white Protestant clergymen found slaves more receptive to an Arminian, emotional, evangelical preaching. By the nineteenth century, Christianity had spread substantially among the slaves.<sup>23</sup>

This proselytizing may have been a vehicle to manage or tame the enslaved African but the soul and spiritual connection was already in the Africans DNA. It did not and would not agree with the colonizing form of Christianity. Biblically, it was not supported and the greed for a capitalized imperialized Christianity is what was being pursued by this soulless humanity that had seemingly not encountered nor experienced the presence of the Living God. Our Liberator is the biblical Jesus, not this western capitalistic, imperialistic, colonized form of Christianity that does not represent nor resemble the biblical Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 353.

<sup>23</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: Black and African Theologies by Josiah U. Young* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 8.

The hypothesis statement is if the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come. “A community that does not analyze its existence theologically is a community that does not care what it says or does. It is a community with no identity.”<sup>24</sup> The themes that are parallel in this project that relate to liberation (Black) theology to be addressed are abandonment of community and culture, brokenness of the people, captivity with dehumanizing overtones and practices that seeks to draw from the God given strategies of a holistic biblical restoration plan found in Nehemiah. The world’s system of conquering that still exist in North America since the Native Americans (Indians) and it continues through the descendants of enslaved Africans.

Humanity has and is suffering, but the struggle is to fight consistently seeking liberation and restoration for all. As late as 1857, the highest court of this land decreed that blacks, “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”<sup>25</sup> The history of slavery in this country reveals how low human depravity can sink. The fact that this country still, in many blatant ways, perpetuates the ideas of the inferiority of blacks, poignantly illustrates the capabilities of human evil. If black theology is going to speak to the condition of black persons, it cannot ignore the history of white inhumanity committed against them. Black history is more than what whites did to blacks. More importantly, black history is black persons saying, “no” to every act of white brutality.

Contrary to what whites say in their history books, black power is not new. It began when black mothers decided to kill their babies rather than have them grow up to be slaves. Black power is Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Gabriel Prosser planning a slave revolt. It is slaves poisoning masters, and Frederick Douglass

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<sup>24</sup> James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> *The Century* (London, UK: Century Company, 1883), 958.

delivering an abolitionist address. This is the history that black theology must take seriously before it can begin to speak about God and the black community.<sup>26</sup>

There are prominently known liberators in the community and some of whom we will never know their names but participated in liberation since the enslaved Africans were brought to this land. Persons sounded the alarm and were awaken the consciousness to the liberation needed and not get entangled by the propaganda on the times we were in.

Four of the most influential blacks in American history authored the Atlantic pieces that follow. Fearing that the sacrifices of the Civil War might be wasted, Frederick Douglass argued in 1866 for "a reconstruction such as will protect loyal men, black and white, in their person and property." He saw black political participation as the primary vehicle by which reconstruction could be attained and protected. Within four years of his essay's publication, black men did indeed obtain the right to vote. But in the South that right was soon subverted by fraud and violence, and within little more than a decade the brutal pigmentocracy of which he had warned had fully reemerged.

Thirty years later, Booker T. Washington articulated his optimistic—some might say naïve—belief that by dint of probity, hard work, and prosperity, blacks could persuade white society to accord them respect. He maintained that friction between the races [would] pass away in proportion as the black man ...can produce something that the white man wants." Yet numerous acts of anti-black mob violence stemmed from resentment against the very sort of entrepreneurialism that Washington championed.

The final two pieces have each attained iconic status. Any well-educated collegian ought to recognize W. E. B. Du Bois's famous evocation of the African-American's dual identity: "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts; two unreconciled strivings ..." A less familiar passage, which also warrants attention, is Du Bois's clear response to the question: What does the African-American want? "He simply wishes," Du Bois insisted, "to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development."

Finally, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter is twentieth-century America's most quoted and inspiring manifesto in defense of humane civil disobedience. Although it addressed most immediately the vexing problem of ends and means in the 1960s struggle for African-American liberation, King's polemic has gone on to enthrall audiences around the world. Nothing better animates the idea of

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<sup>26</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 25-26.

universal human rights than his declaration that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."<sup>27</sup>

This project seeks to address deconstructive behaviors and beliefs and create deconstruction in churches. Churches lack infrastructure of a succession plan for when a long tenured pastor either transitions in earthly assignment or to eternal position. Churches can become stagnate or decline because of outdated policies and practices that no longer speak to or are sensitive to the times in which we are doing ministry. Church leadership structures also need to be evaluated to meet the needs of the congregation and for the future congregation of the church. Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred under their command (1 Chron. 12:32 NRSV).

The theological relevance of the developing holistic biblical infrastructure for churches and communities to thrive when tragedies and transitions arise is because the faces of oppression has taken on many facets, figures and forms. The theological attributes and characteristics of a liberating God has not changed since the Exodus experience. "Liberation theology is a synthesis of Christian theology and socio-economic analyses, sometimes based in far-left politics, particularly Marxism, that emphasizes 'social concern for the poor and political liberation for oppressed peoples.'"<sup>28</sup>

Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that the sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed

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<sup>27</sup> Randall Kendall, "Civil Rights and Black Identity," *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/03/civil-rights-black-identity/304608/>.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Cook, ed., *Dictionary of Historical Terms*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: The MacMillan Press LTD, 1989), 203.



will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

In the New Testament, Jesus says of Himself when he is handed the scroll of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Lk. 4:18-21 NRSV).

If the Liberator of humanity, Jesus, acknowledges that oppression exists, but says this is one of the reasons for which He has come. Why does not the Christianity in this country seek to do the same in the world today? How can we continue to be passive and propagate this capitalistic, imperialistic, colonized form of western Christianity that has perpetuated oppression of people of color? Jesus has already answered and granted access to relieve and resolve oppression, through a spirit of liberation.

There can be no Christian theology that has not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of the Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are over laden.<sup>30</sup>

Christianity is best when those who claim to be are mimicking and modeling the behavior of the Jesus of the scripture. This is the action that liberation (Black) theology seeks to set the captives and oppressed free from this capitalistic, imperialistic colonizing form of western Christianity.

Enslaved Africans and their descendants have been fed at the beginning of their captivity a dehumanizing and degrading misconstrued ideology that the oppressors

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<sup>29</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

promoted as Christianity only to be superior. It is very ironic that these oppressors who are accredited with founding this North American land were fleeing from the same oppression of religious freedom in a humane way. Their fight for reform darkens their hearts and vision from the liberty that the Gospel of Jesus Christ seeks to give. Instead, they entered into the most barbaric and inhumane practice of all human history, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The enslaved Africans and others captured people were not void of theology; they were void of a heartless theology.

In the African American experience, the persons most likely “doing” theology were preachers and civic leaders opposed to the academically trained theologians contended with threats to Christian theology, African Americans developed their theological understandings in the crucible of slave experience. Early African Americans Christian theology was birthed and grew up in the context of American chattel slavery and the Colonial experience. Consequently, one has to look not in the academy but in sermons, slave narratives, political speeches and popular writings for traces of the early beliefs of African Americans since the 1700’s. In these sources one can trace a set of theological ideas and convictions arguably as important and influential in lived experience than more precise academic statements. These sources vary in depth, intention and representativeness, but are collectively a good collage of African American beliefs. And when set in “dialogue” with later academic theologians, great potential for tracing a story emerges—a story not necessarily of cause and effect, but of vision and revision based upon some degree on the historical and social settings in which African Americans found themselves.<sup>31</sup>

Our experience is this North America has been oppressive and this oppression is inscribed in the laws of this land that continues to be opposed to the equality of enslaved Africans and their descendants. African Americans moved from being chained and shackled on ships to being caged in prisons that make a profit from their imprisonment. A large population of African and other minority population are the imprisoned, while the law supports this inequitable practice.

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<sup>31</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of the African American Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 17.

Since the nation's founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time. As described in the pages that follow, there is a certain pattern to this cycle. Following the collapse of each system of control, there has been a period of confusion-transition-in which those who are most committed to racial hierarchy search for new means to achieve their goals within the rules of the game as currently defined. It is during this period of uncertainty that the backlash intensifies, and a new form of racialized social control begins to take hold. The adoption of the new system of control is never inevitable, but to date it has never been avoided. The most ardent proponents of racial hierarchy have consistently succeeded in implementing new racial caste systems by triggering a collapse of resistance across the political spectrum. This fear has been achieved largely by appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the bottom of American hierarchy.<sup>32</sup>

“Black history refers to the way blacks were brought to this land and the way they have been treated in this land.”<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that only American whites participated in the institution of slavery. There was something unique about American slavery-namely, the white attempt to define blacks as nonpersons. In other countries slaves were allowed community, and there were slave rights. Slaves were human beings, and their humanity was protected (to some degree) by certain civil laws.

Black history in North America meant that whites used every conceivable method to destroy black humanity. It is because of these embedded and entrenched reasons that a holistic biblical infrastructure must be developed to restructure the miseducation and misguided theological thought that perpetuates the continued deconstruction in churches and communities. This western form of Christianity has oppressed and shaped this country's view in the characterization of enslaved Africans and their descendants. A holistic biblical view of the Liberator's teachings to emancipate those on the margins of

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<sup>32</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2011), 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 27.

life, who are the last, the least, the left out, the lonely, and the lost. We have the chief example in the conversion of Saul to Paul, through his call and commissioning of his ministry to the Gentiles; there is still an influential impact and model of liberation today. The development of a holistic biblical infrastructure of that would assist churches and communities to thrive when tragedies and transitions arise was not just what Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., James H. Cone, and other theologians who fought the freedom fights, but across the world liberation was and is still a movement. This movement was and is led by people who had a heart for humanity and those who were overlooked and underserving in the eyes of those in power. A group of ordinary people who connect to an extraordinary God for the empowerment of liberating themselves and all who are oppressed. Developing holistic biblical views of infrastructure for church and community is essential for the liberation and restoration of this generation and for generations to come.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

This interdisciplinary foundation document in the first section draws liberating strategies from the biblical foundations document during the oppression of the Hebrews while they were in captivity found in Nehemiah 1:17-18. The second section will relate to the theological foundations document, how the faith of the enslaved Africans was not the same Christianity that had enslaved them. Examining the psychological manipulation, that the slave owners used Christianity to oppress enslaved Africans and their descendance. The third section relates to the historical foundations document by examining the systematic patterns of deconstruction that the enslaved African has been experiencing from the African Diaspora into the systemic laws of this land of oppression to prevent the collective rise of unity of the descendance of enslaved Africans.

The hypothesis is that the church needs to develop a holistic biblical infrastructure then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come. Many churches in the African American communities have not prepared for the death of the pastor nor the transition of the pastor moving from one church to another. If the infrastructure of the church was as systematic as the world of oppression it will thrive and not die when transitions occur.

This discipline will aid this project by gaining an insight and perspective of institutional structures and systems that have been constructed and imposed for

oppression. By clearing a pathway and creating strategies of liberation for generations to come, these systems have been constructed and imposed for centuries and must be carefully and systematically deconstructed to liberate and teach truth of culture, history, identity, and self-awareness.

The interdisciplinary foundation of the doctoral project is supported by the discipline of sociology and or social science. This discipline impacts social institutions and interactions of people and culture, how they function based upon what has been established which leads the focus on Critical Race Theory. It is the study patterns of social relationships, social interactions, and culture of everyday life. It uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, acceptance and change or social evolution.<sup>1</sup>

Norbert Elias's "The Civilizing Process" which was published in German in 1939 and first translated into English in two volumes in 1978 and 1982 is now widely regarded as one of the great works of twentieth century sociology. That volume attempted to explain how Europeans came to think of themselves as more civilized than their forebears and neighboring societies. Elias analyzed the interplay between the rise of state monopolies of power, increasing levels of economic interconnectedness between people and pressures to become attuned to others over greater distances that led to advances in identifying with others in the same society irrespective of social origins.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, "Sociology and Social Science," Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology>.

<sup>2</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenic*, Wiley, Wesleyan University, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40864499>.

The analysis of the civilizing process was not confined, however, to explaining changing social bonds within separate societies. The investigation also focused on the division of Europe into sovereign states that were embroiled in struggles for power and security. Only by placing short-term trends in long-term perspective could sociologists understand contemporary developments. This article maintains that Elias's analysis of the civilizing process remains an exemplary study of long-term developments in Western societies over the last five centuries. Its main purpose was to understand how, over roughly five centuries of development, Europeans came to the view that they were "civilized" while others were "barbaric" or languishing in a "savage" past.<sup>3</sup>

The analysis did not condone those self-images; the point was not to share in European self-congratulation, but to understand the processes that led to the sense of cultural superiority. The focus of "The Civilizing Process" was on understanding unplanned processes; they may be said to have a structural or systemic quality, in that humans are moved along by forces that they do not control or necessarily comprehend. However, Elias rejected systems analysis and preferred the notion of figuration to stress that those forces stemmed from the ways in which people were bound together and by the pressures that they placed on each other. The notion of a social system that stood apart from the main patterns of social interaction was regarded as profoundly misleading.<sup>4</sup>

The study of this discipline will impact this project by building and developing elements of self-resilience to adapt and adjust when devastation and tragedies occur.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Linklater and Stephen Mennell, "Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*—An Overview and Assessment," *History and Theory* 49, no. 3 (October 2010): 384-411.

<sup>4</sup> Linklater and Mennell, "Norbert Elias," 384-411.

This will also add depth to some embedded self-inflicting root causes that have been set in motion from the formation of this country. This would shine light on the root and create a space to confront self-hate and self-hurt. Hopefully, it would be resolved by deconstructing the root causes and reconstructing on healing and holistic foundations of awareness. It is important for leaders to be able to deconstruct the perpetual plight of oppression and oppressive systems in this land. By knowing how and why these systems exists in society to systematically oppressed people of color, so that the future generations will be informed of these historical structures and learn how to halt them and to heal from these oppressive systems. This discipline will inform and provide some insight in a path to resolving some infrastructural challenges in society that challenges churches and communities. The societal infrastructure has created obstacles since the emptiness of the Emancipation Proclamation until today. These societal systems have created hinderances on the enslaved Africans and their descendants to create generationally faith heritage, family heritage and finance heritage, by strategically deconstructing and destroying all that has been constructed to beautify and boost the self-awareness and self-esteem of people of color.

The social science that has been breed in this country has perpetually deconstructed all attempts of mass oneness of the enslaved Africans and their descendants by selling and separating families, by emasculating men, raping women, and traumatizing children through what they have experienced by their parents because of cruelty and hate they had received. Through the continuing societal systems that mainly impact to the descendants of enslaved Africans through the laws of this land and the prison system that allows for a new form of plantation slavery. The probation system and



sentencing for persons of color is not equal nor equitable with that of a white person in this country.

This leads to the theory in social science of Critical Race Theory that will further aid and assist in the effort to deconstruct the societal systematic structures that oppress people of color in this country. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is defined by UCLA School of Public Affairs in this way, recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. Critical Race Theory identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color.<sup>5</sup>

It is in this construct that the enslaved Africans, their descendants and other people of color have been hindered and oppressed by these systemic structures solely created to marginalize all non-whites. This power is the structure and systems that this country is built and founded upon. It has influenced and shaped society. This is a major psychological manipulation of white supremacy. The foundational writings of CRT began in the late 1960s from the legal scholarship of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman.

These writings focused specifically on the reduction of gains of the Civil Rights Era thought to be won in 1964 and rollback of the integrationist agendas set forth in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In Derrick Bell's earlier works, he argued that gains of blacks were inextricably wed to the temporary alignment of the self-interests of elite whites and the interests of blacks or the interest convergence between whites'

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<sup>5</sup> UCLA School of Public Affairs, "What is Critical Race Theory?" WordPress.com, <http://www.spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

interest and black aspirations. This body of work led to a critical examination of integration, school desegregation, and the newly instilled privileges of the Civil Rights Era and maintained that integration was a political consequence of U. S. attempts to maintain soft power legitimacy against communism during the cold war.<sup>6</sup>

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement can be seen as a group of interdisciplinary scholars and activists interested in studying and changing the relationship between race, racism, and power. This is crucial to understand in order to fully realize the goals of CRT in Spanish. Critical Race Theory is an amalgamation of concepts that have been derived from the Civil Rights and ethnic studies discourses. In the 1970s, a number of lawyers, activists, and scholars saw the work of the Civil Rights as being stalled and in many instances negated. They also saw the liberal and positivist views of laws as being colorblind and ignorant of the racism that is pervasive in the law.<sup>7</sup>

The works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman have been attributed to the start of CRT. Bell and Freeman were frustrated with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. They argued that the traditional approaches of combating racism were producing smaller gains than in previous years. Thus, Critical Race Theory is an outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was a leftist movement that challenged traditional legal scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

These CRT scholars continued forward and were joined by Richard Delgado. In 1989, they held their first conference in Madison, Wisconsin. This was the beginning of

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<sup>6</sup> Tommy J. Curry, *Critical Race Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2009), 167.

<sup>7</sup> UCLA School of Public Affairs, "What is Critical Race Theory?" <http://www.spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

<sup>8</sup> UCLA School of Public Affairs, "What is Critical Race Theory?" <http://www.spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

the CRT as a movement.<sup>9</sup> Others who have continued the work that Bell, Freeman and Delgado began has been expanded by Kimberle' Crenshaw, Neil T. Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas. In their work Critical Race Theory, they established the groundwork this systems construction. The racialization of identity and the radical subordination of blacks and Native Americans provided the ideological basis for slavery and conquest. Although the systems of oppression of blacks and Native Americans differed in form – the former involving the seizure and appropriation of labor, the latter entailing the seizure and appropriation of land – undergirding both was a racialized conception of property implemented by force and ratified by law.<sup>10</sup>

The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country, it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress blacks and Indians. Rather, it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property which played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination.<sup>11</sup>

This discipline of sociology and or social science of exploring Critical Race Theory that exposes the elements of “color blindness” and “whiteness theory” will develop and impact the project’s theme because of the structure and systems in this land perpetuate disastrous and devastating traumatic experiences that have reverberated throughout the generations. The construction of white identity and the ideology of racial hierarchy were intimately tied to the evolution and expansion of the system of chattel

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<sup>9</sup> UCLA School of Public Affairs, “What is Critical Race Theory?”  
<http://www.spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

<sup>10</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings* (New York, NY: The New York Press, 1995), 277.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, *Critical Race Theory*, 277.

slavery. The further entrenchment of plantation slavery was in part an answer to a social crisis produced by the eroding capacity of the landed class to control white labor population. The dominant paradigm of social relations, however, was that while not all Africans were slaves, virtually all slaves were not white. It was the racial otherness that came to justify the subordinate status of blacks. The result was a classification system that key official rules of descent to national origin.<sup>12</sup> “Members in the new social category of ‘Negro’ became itself sufficient justification for enslavability.”<sup>13</sup>

By the 1660s, the especially degraded status of blacks as chattel slaves was recognized by law. Between 1680 and 1682, the first slave codes appeared, enshrining the extreme deprivations of liberty already existing in social practice. Many laws parceled out differential treatment based upon racial categories: blacks were not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons; nor were they to be educated. Racial identity was further merged with stratified social and legal status: “black” racial identity marked who was subject to enslavement; whereas “white” racial identity marked who was “free” or, at minimum, not a slave. The ideological and rhetorical move from “slave” and “free” to “black” and “white” as polar constructs marked an important step in the social construction of race.<sup>14</sup>

The practice of human enslavement is a phenomenon of mankind that extends back to prehistoric times. However, the enslavement of black people in America has been so totally unique in its role, scope, and consequences that historians, politicians, and

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<sup>12</sup> Harris, *Critical Race Theory*, 278.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Gotanda, *A Critique of “Our Constitution” is Color Blind* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995), 262.

<sup>14</sup> Harris, *Critical Race Theory*, 278.

social scientist have referred to American slavery as a “peculiar” institution. These observations of human behavior consider black enslavement peculiar because it defied all accepted religious precepts and secular standards of normative behavior. Moreover, black slavery did not voluntarily free blacks. Nor did the slaves successfully rise up in revolt to free themselves. It took a four-year Civil War, costing nearly a half million lives, with whites against other whites, and still the Southern white’s economic and psychological dependence on black people could not be totally broken. No other human enslavement has engendered such intense emotional attachments, conflicts, hatreds and wealth for as many nations as did black enslavement. Blacks cannot afford to put slavery behind them, as numerous black and white leaders suggest. Black enslavement must be a constant reminder of the ramifications of a lack of collective unity, strength and self-determination.<sup>15</sup> These institutional systems and the reverberating effects of the traumatic experience of slavery that have been felt throughout the generations of blacks in this country makes it an issue of race.

In the context of Blessed Hope Baptist Church, it was rebuilt and revived by the liberating strategies that was used in Nehemiah to rebuild and restore the walls of Jerusalem. One of the key elements of this Nehemiah passage is that despite the plush position that Nehemiah enjoyed, his heart was with his people and their homeland. They were in captivity; but they were not being dehumanized. The king allowed for Nehemiah to take an envoy and funding to go back to rebuild the land of his ancestors. Their captivity was a self-inflicted captivity because the Hebrews rebelled against God. Nehemiah after learning of the destruction of Jerusalem, he cried out in prayer and

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<sup>15</sup> Claude Anderson, *Black Labor White Power* (Edgewood, MD: Duncan and Duncan, Inc., 1994), 66.

fasting to seek the face of God. This is an essential element of infrastructure in the life of the church that people know how to pray and even fast before God for direction and wisdom when tragedy and trauma occur. This essential element of prayer and fasting prepared Nehemiah to hear the God-given strategy to liberate and reconnect the people with the God of their forefathers and be restored to the land of promise.

The members of Blessed Hope have a rich history, but tragedy and trauma have been experienced in waves that have been too enormous for immediate recovery. Under the leadership of the founding pastor, Rev. J. E. Green who served for forty-eight years, Blessed Hope experienced many struggles, but the successes outweighed them all. The earlier members were able to grow, purchase land, expand, build a new sanctuary and many families grew up together. After the elevation of Rev. Green from labor to reward, the church was in mourning while the transition of new leadership was taking place. The church continued to grow; but there was turbulence with the new younger leadership. This caused Blessed Hope to experience another loss, their new pastor split the church and took many of the founding members. This traumatic experience happened within five years of the Rev. Green's elevation. Now a fraction of the remnant remains, but Blessed Hope continues to thrive. Again, new leadership comes in and within five years, another split, another traumatic loss and now even less of a fraction of the remnant remains. Additionally, the temple and the walls are in ruins.

This is where the discipline of social science is implemented to help understand the human behavior of the people who make up the lesser of the fraction of the remnant that has survived a series of traumatic shifts without being led in a period of grieving with a pathway to spiritual renewal. In seeking the Lord on how to lead His people from these

painful and traumatic experiences that they have survived, it became obvious to lead the people to understand the need to acknowledge what happened in the church and acknowledge their participation in what happened or their lack of participation of what happened. The second step was to accept what happened, accept their role in what has happened for progress or for peril. Lastly, the congregants were moved towards learning to be accountable for their actions. The behavior of the people was accusatory and against any change, these behaviors hindered growth, progress and restoration. In following the God-given strategy and the pattern and plan given in the book of Nehemiah to pray and fast before the Lord, God moved in the attitude and the behavior of the people to be more compassionate, like Christ. This did not come without opposition. The continual hope and prayer was that God would continue to restore and rebuild God's church, that she will be a symbol of God's presence and power to revive church and community after tragedy and transitions happen. One must not allow the disasters, destructions nor devastations experienced in life to wipe out hope when transitions and tragedies occur. One must remain to be a people of hope because God has power to redeem, restore and revive tragic and traumatic experiences! God is faithful to provide the strategy and to provide the steadfastness that one needs to see His salvation come to pass in our lives.

This second section will show the relationship of how the social science and Critical Race Theory interacts with Black Liberation Theology, how the faith of enslaved Africans was not the same Christianity that was used to enslave them. Examining the psychological manipulation, that the slave owners used to oppress the enslaved Africans and their descendancy. The psychological theory of race offers the psychic dimension in the race debate. White people embody a deep need for and rationalization of human

phenotype differentiations. Whites create a world or culture reflective of their inner fantasies. Their inner desires give way to cultural formations that meet their psychic needs. The ego's fantasy drives, and symbol-making allow people with power to craft inequitable systems in culture that incarnate the powerful one's psychological visions. The political theory of race welds notions of racial connections to the wielding and distribution of power within the civic and public spheres. White supremacy, like a demonic multipronged policy, monopolizes political power over Third World people domestically and internationally.<sup>16</sup>

The (white) racial contract fulfills its mission to take material resources, self-esteem, and land from Third World people domestically and abroad. The making of the white race is, in fact, by legal fiat. Race is a legal construction in America.<sup>17</sup> Based upon Genesis chapter nine, the so-called curse of Ham, European Christians subscribed to this conceptual posture during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Likewise, white supremacist Christians in the United States during slavery and American apartheid trumpeted this theological rationale for the subhuman creation of the black race.<sup>18</sup> It is within the construction of these fantasies that white America has manipulated and mutilated the humanity and image of the African, enslaved African and their descendancy. These fantasies are not just limited to construction of a race in America but also the religion of America, that is a western capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of

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<sup>16</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human Race, Culture, Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 121.

<sup>17</sup> Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York, NY: University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, *Being Human Race*, 121.



Christianity. This was shaped by the planters and plunderers of this North American continent.

This systemic structure of oppression in this country against Native Americans, enslaved Africans and other minority groups who have been and are being oppressed by a system that protects the privileges and rights of a few while oppressing the masses for their place of superiority.

Though it has roots in the pre-Civil War black church which recognized that racism and Christianity were opposites, “black theology” is a phenomenon of the 1960s. One way of describing it is to say that it is religious counterpart of the more secular movement called “black power”. This means that black theology is a religious explication of black people’s need to define the scope and meaning of black existence in a white racist society. The black existential mood that express itself in black power and black theology stems from the recognition that black identity must be defined in terms of its African heritage rather than in terms of European enslavement.<sup>19</sup>

This project seeks to address the deconstructive behaviors and beliefs that causes and creates a deconstructive community and environment.

The heart of Cone’s work has centered on the political and structural manifestations of White racism as demonic. If Jesus Christ calls the oppressed African American community to fight for its liberation, then this faith gathering must wage a battle to deconstruct white supremacist power relations. There can be no participation in God’s liberation movement on earth if poor Black folk do not achieve their liberation from visible evil systems created and perpetuated by principalities and powers with White faces.<sup>20</sup>

The enslaved Africans were taken from their land and lifestyle, beaten and treated like barbarians then placed in an oppressive systematic structure of life that never allowed them to universally rise up in unity. This systemic structure would always protect white privilege and oppress the descendance of enslaved Africans. They control it all through

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<sup>19</sup> James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology*, 61.

the law of this land that has not changed to free the descendance of enslaved Africans since the Slave Codes of 1640.

The disinherited experience the disintegrating effect of contempt in some such fashion as did Goliath. There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person. That threat of violence is ever present, and there is no way to determine precisely when it may come crushing down upon you. In modern power politics this is called a war of nerves. The underprivileged in any society are the victims of the perpetual war of nerves. The logic of the state of affairs is physical violence, but it need not fulfill itself in order to work its perfect havoc in the souls of the poor.<sup>21</sup>

The modifications to the laws of this land since 1640 have never favored enslaved Africans nor their descendants only modified to seemingly reconstruct new boundaries for the times to maintain white power and white privilege in place. The Critical Race Theory addresses deconstructing the law system in this society based upon race. The system that was established from the establishment of this land has been to create a subclass or subordinate class to do all the labor for the elite group. In America, white-black race relations are systemic, and reproduced culturally, institutionally, and socially from generation to generation.<sup>22</sup>

This systemic racism confers a permanent minority status to blacks that is ignored in contemporary treatments of race. “For Bell, Blacks should not disown their racial status but embrace its totality. He says, “acceptance of the racial realist concept would enable [Blacks] to understand and respond to recurring aspects of our subordinate status. It would free them to think and plan within a context of reality rather than idealism.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Derrick Bell, “Racial Realism,” *Connecticut Law Review* 24 (1992): 308.

“By Bell’s thinking, accepting the consequences of a Black racial identity is a much better instrument by which Blacks can diagnose the ills of American racism, then the common home remedy of denial. Today however, many Black thinkers cannot resolve themselves against the post-Civil Rights imperative that maintains that it is unethical to emphasize the role that race plays in determining the reality of Blacks.”<sup>24</sup> Liberation is not in these created categories that oppressors have created and boxed blacks in, but in the liberating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There can be no Christian Theology that is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused. In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are over laden.<sup>25</sup>

It is apparent that because the society we live in has a different view of humanity from scripture and how they view Christianity. This Critical Race Theory will serve as a guide to deconstruct the erroneous teaching of society and to reconstruct the view of the God of the gospel for those who are oppressed by the laws of this land. Many of churches and communities have not been liberated in their thinking and this project will seek to engage the misnomers of this western form of Christianity and seek to gain a perspective and power of the liberating view of Jesus who came to liberate those who are being oppressed.

This third section will show the relationship of the historical foundations and Critical Race Theory, by examining the systematic patterns of deconstruction that the

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<sup>24</sup> Tommy Curry, *Saved by the Bell: Derrick Bell’s Racial Realism as Pedagogy* (Nashville, TN: Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society, 2008), 41.

<sup>25</sup> Cone, *A Theology of Black Liberation*, 1.

enslaved Africans had experienced during the African Diaspora into the systemic laws of the land of oppression to prevent the collective rise of unity of the descendance of enslaved Africans. Virginia's codes and laws set the stage and standards for how African slaves and others would be oppressed in this New World without an expiration date.

“Why of all the multitudinous groups in this country [do] you have to single out Negroes and given them this separate treatment.”<sup>26</sup>

The code, which would also serve as a model for other colonies, went even further. The law imposed harsh physical punishments, since enslaved persons who did not own property could not be required to pay fines. It stated that slaves needed written permission to leave their plantation, that slaves found guilty of murder or rape would be hanged, that for robbing or any other major offence, the slave would receive sixty lashes and be placed in stocks, where his or her ears would be cut off, and that for minor offences, such as associating with whites, slaves would be whipped, branded, or maimed.<sup>27</sup>

This is the systemic structure that has been in place at the establishment of this New World and has proliferated throughout the centuries and into today's government. Society is still governing people of color through the lens of the seventeenth century laws and views. However, society is founded upon Christianity. The Open Secret of America is that it made slavery legal and lawful for a subordinate class to be the labor to always support the elite. Will this continue without an expiration date?

Where slavery was growing, as in the lower South in the late eighteen and early nineteenth centuries, new and more stringent laws were enacted. All over the South, however, there emerge a body of laws generally regarded as the Slave Codes, which covered every aspect of the life of the slave. There were variations from state to state, but the general point of view laws should protect the ownership of such property and should also protect whites against any dangers that might arise from the presence of large numbers of slaves. It was also felt that

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<sup>26</sup> Thurgood Marshall, oral argument before the U.S. Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483 (1954).

<sup>27</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, “Virginia's Slave Codes,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p268.html>.

slaves should be maintained in a position of due subordination in order that optimum of discipline and work could be achieved.<sup>28</sup>

It was not enough for enslaved Africans not to be considered human, but the way property was treated, the animals were treated better than the enslaved African. Such treatment has shaped and stabilized a view of the enslaved African and their descendance that has not changed in society and is present this very day.

Although the early colonists were cognizant of race, racial lines were neither consistently nor sharply delineated among or within all social groups. Captured Africans sold in the Americas were distinguished from the population of indentured or bond servants – “unfree” white labor – but it was not an irrebuttable presumption that all Africans were “slaves,” or that slavery was the only appropriate status for them. The distinction between African and white indentured labor grew, however, as decreasing terms of service were introduced for white bond servants. Simultaneously, the demand for labor intensified, resulting in a greater reliance on African labor and a rapid increase in the number of Africans imported to the colonies. Slavery produced a peculiar, mixed category of property and humanity – a hybrid with inherent instabilities that were reflected in its treatment and ratification by the law. The dual and contradictory character of slaves as property and persons was exemplified in the Representation Clause of the Constitution. Representation in the House of Representatives was apportioned on the basis of population computed by counting all persons and “three-fifths of all other persons” – slaves.<sup>29</sup>

Critical Race Theory is a key insight into how the laws of this land has shaped perspectives and views of non-white Americans and how they should be treated. This theory connects with the historical document and allows the deconstruction of some historical perspectives to reconstruct the self-esteem and self-image of people of color.

The insights in social science and Critical Race Theory will better shape the project in the focus of the behavior of society and the structure of institutional systems

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<sup>28</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), 124.

<sup>29</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995), 278.

created to govern people. Biblically, this discipline provides insight into the behavior of people left to make their own choices absent of godly leadership. The leader must have a strategy that cares for the entire body and not for a few select individuals. Theologically, this discipline points to the oppression that people of color have suffered because of the legal system in this country and the need for liberating the oppressed. Historically, this discipline shows what type of Christianity it was built on as it has ignored that humanity was all made in the image of God. The planters did not consider the enslaved African as human being nor a neighbor; but they are the Christians in this country.

This theory points to color-blindness and whiteness elements that allows for whites to walk around as they are to be served and all are subordinate to them. Critical Race Theory clearly shows how from the foundation of the Constitution to the laws that govern this land today, people of color were always going to be oppressed by what was written into laws for whites to be the ruling minority.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

The research is based upon my ministry context at Blessed Hope Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. The hypothesis of my research is if the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come.

My journey to this ministry context flowed from my home church ministry context of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. My pastor, Rev. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby allowed me to candidate for the pastorate of Blessed Hope Baptist Church, while serving on his senior staff. Upon becoming a finalist for the pastoral position at Blessed Hope Baptist Church, I learned of the church's history. The founding pastor, Rev. J. E. Green, served forty-eight years; and I am the fourth pastor, now serving this congregation for almost nine years, while my two former predecessors serve approximately five years each and split the church both times.

Blessed Hope Baptist Church has experienced stability in her first forty-eight years of existence but the last twenty have been challenging; and she experienced abandonment, bitterness, confusion, disappointment, hurt and much pain. The people need to be reborn and rebuilt because only a remnant remains that remember the church in its former glory. In the rebirthing and rebuilding, God is able to make all things new and restore that which was once before will be made new again. It is my supposition that when a church (community or company) develops a holistic infrastructure then the

church (community or company) will thrive when it experiences tragedies and transitions in the life of its existence.

Nehemiah the second chapter capsulates and is almost parallel to the conditions Blessed Hope Baptist Church had experienced when God called me to serve this church. The restoration of the walls serves as a reminder to Judah, that God was their Protector. Upon their return from exile, they participated in the rebuilding project of a painful experience of being captured and held captive; but now they must process their pain to promote their progress of restoring the walls around Jerusalem. Nehemiah's God given strategy of rebuilding the walls was to invite and involve all who had lost their hope. The rebuilding was a memorial and provided momentum for all that God was going to do in redeeming and restoring His people.

It is my hope and prayer for my ministry assignment at Blessed Hope Baptist Church that God will continue to restore and rebuild His church. We must not allow the disasters, destructions, nor devastations that have occurred in the church to wipe out our hope. The reality is that transitions and tragedies will occur throughout our lifetime, but we must always remain to be a people of hope, because our God has all power! As believers in Jesus Christ, we are the redeemed and the remnant that must commit our hands to this good work, "let us rise up and build!"

My historical foundation is born from the African Diaspora. The planters of this new land would need a labor force to work the ground for a cheap wage, because the goal was profit. Indentured servants first arrived in America in the decade following the settlement of Jamestown by the Virginia Company in 1607. The idea of indentured servitude was born from a need for cheap labor on this new land. The earliest settlers



soon realized that they had lots of land to care for, but no one to care for it. So, with the passage to the colonies being expensive for all but the wealthy, the Virginia Company developed the system of indentured servitude to attract workers, who mainly ended up being people of color. Indentured servants became vital to the colonial economy.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, the settlers (or planters) who would be the leaders in this New World have been solely focused on the economic growth of one group and to have a fixed cheap labor group.

This has been embedded and has been fed into our society from the beginning that has been justified by a capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity by oppression, which is not Christianity at all. When the indentured servants who were the same hue as the settlers, became too expensive because once they either escaped or fulfilled their service contract, then they were awarded a freedom package that included “...at least 25 acres of land, a year's worth of corn, arms, a cow, and new clothes.”<sup>2</sup> The answer to this expensive rising cost came across the Atlantic Oceans on ships in inhumane conditions because it was not about humanity nor morality; it was about a hunger for having more, greed, with little to no expense, off the backs of enslaved Africans.

In 1619, the first documented Africans were brought to Virginia as slaves, but with no slave laws in place, they were initially treated as indentured servants, and given the same opportunities for freedom as their white counterparts. However, slave laws were

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<sup>1</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” Oregon Public Broadcasting, <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

<sup>2</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,” <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

soon passed – in Massachusetts in 1641 and Virginia in 1661 – and any small freedoms that might have existed for blacks were taken away. As demands for labor grew, so did the cost of indentured servants. Many landowners also felt threatened by newly freed servants demand for land. The colonial elite realized the problems of indentured servitude. Landowners turned to African slaves as a more profitable and ever-renewable source of labor and the shift from indentured servants to racial slavery had begun.<sup>3</sup>

Mainly the differences between the first indentured servants and those from Africa, was their skin color and laws were passed to impose upon and oppress the Africans to remain the free labor source for the settlers with no expiration date. This is what I call the “Open Secret of America” and the laws from the seventeenth century in America have systematically continued to dominate and influence the North America judicial system then and now. Certainly, many advancements and strides have occurred; but those gains pale in comparison to the economical disadvantages that African Americans have repetitiously and systemically suffered as obstacles before them for perpetuate systemic economic oppression. The plight of the African who had been brought to North America by captors, were not consider human, but this new land was and still is driven by its capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity that cloaks oppression in its warped view Christianity and they write view into the law of the land, this is their “Open Secret.” Therein lies the codes and laws that have been and are still being enforced and reinforced still today to continue oppression and rule the African, their descendance and others the settlers enslaved then and now, “Slave Laws Passed in Virginia.”

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<sup>3</sup> PBS Online, “History Detectives,”  
<https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>.

The main impetus of the enslavement of Africans and the Transatlantic Slave Trade has to do with economics and the restriction of freed Africans to obtain independent economic stability and equitable justice. The systemic structure continues to deconstruct and dilute pure constructs of freed enslaved Africans through the lack of economics, education, and equity in justice then and now. The implementation of the systemic deconstructive approaches since the African Diaspora with the creation of the Virginia Slave Codes still governs North America today. If United States of America wants to live out the truth of its Constitution and Creeds, that she is so proud of, she must be willing to openly confess and repent of her past and present inequities and injustices. Reformation and a critical critique its laws, policies, and practices by cleansing herself of oppressing the truth about her past.

The theological foundations chapter involves the progressive movement of the systematic theory of liberation theology into black liberation theology. Liberation theology seeks to empower and uplift those who have been left out, locked out, looked over, and intentionally marginalized. This theology connects with the struggle and suffering of those who are oppressed and seeks to deconstruct the hypocrisy of western Christianity, that has been the catalyst in oppression of people of color. This project seeks to address the deconstructive behaviors and beliefs that causes and creates a deconstructive nature in our communities and environments. The oppressed people seeking liberation that comes from a biblical view of Jesus as Liberator, not this cosmetic European painting of Jesus that does not accurately display the features of the resurrected and victorious Jesus of Revelation chapter one. This systemic religion and theological

view of western capitalistic imperialistic colonized form of Christianity that has been perpetuated and passed on to enslaved Africans and their descendants as the white savior.

The development of a holistic biblical infrastructure of that would assist churches and communities to thrive when tragedies and transitions arise was not just birthed in Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Howard Thurman, Fannie Lou Hammer, Martin Luther King Jr., James H. Cone, and other theologians that fought for the rights of freedom, but across the world liberation was and is still a movement. This movement was and is led by people who had a heart for humanity and those who were overlooked and underserving in the eyes of those in power, such as the Black Lives Matter grassroots movement. A group of ordinary people who connected to an extraordinary God for the empowerment of liberating themselves and all who are oppressed. Developing holistic biblical views of infrastructure for church and community is essential for the liberation and restoration of this generation and for generations to come.

The interdisciplinary foundation chapter is supported by the discipline of sociology and or social science. This discipline impacts social institutions and interactions of people and culture, how they function based upon what has been established which leads the focus on Critical Race Theory. It is the study patterns of social relationships, social interactions, and culture of everyday life. It uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, acceptance and change or social evolution.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia, "Sociology and Social Science," Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociology).

The study of this discipline impacted this project by building and developing elements of self-resilience to adapt and adjust when devastation and tragedies occur. This will also add depth to some embedded self-inflicting root causes that have been set in motion from the formation of this country. This would shine light on the root and create a space to confront self-hate and self-hurt. Hopefully, by identifying these root causes to be deconstructing then reconstructing a path to healing and a hopeful tomorrow. It is important for leaders to be able to deconstruct the perpetual plight of oppression and oppressive systems in the land. By knowing how and why these systems exists in society to systematically oppress people of color, so that the future generations will be informed of historical structure; but also, they will know how to halt and heal from oppressive systems. This discipline will inform and provide some insight in a path to resolving some infrastructural challenges in society that challenges churches and communities.

### **Methodology**

My project began during the crisis of COVID-19, collided while our church was celebrating its seventieth Church Anniversary, with the theme “Look at What the Lord has Done” according to Psalm 118:23. This theme was birthed from the sermons and studies from those exilic books of Nehemiah, Ezra, and Esther. We studied those books in that order because we had walls in our church that needed building up. The wall of faith needed rebuilding, the wall of joy needed rebuilding, the wall of peace needed rebuilding, the wall of love needed rebuilding, and the wall of hope needed rebuilding. We were blessed to have enough sponsors and support to have printed a full color eighty-page anniversary souvenir booklet. The theme going into 2020 was “Christocentric”

focus and we committed to studying and preaching through the Gospel of John for the majority of 2020.

The research period of my project covered about three months, from September 2020 through November 2020, the monthly scripture readings covered John chapters fifteen through twenty. We were reading two chapters a month. This was my introductory approach in moving the membership. During this period, we prayed at 6:00 a.m. Monday through Friday. We had a sermon series on Christ being the focus of all transformations; and the Bible studies were an extension of what was preached on Sundays to foster more discussion for a broader understanding. The scriptures that were covered came from the Gospel of John, focusing on the miracles/signs that Jesus did on His way to Calvary. We also meet weekly after worship to discuss and talk through the transformation process, rebuilding of our Christian thought and understanding as well as the church. We also included a book review of *The Five Star Church* by Alan Nelson and Stan Toler. These were my methodology approaches in gathering my qualitative data for this project. I received the consent from each participant; and they completed a pre-survey. We scheduled a time for their interview; and they completed a post-survey. Included in this time, we used our Christian Education gatherings and held meetings after worship to discuss our restoration process. The Consent Form and the Interview Questions are in the appendix section.

COVID-19 interrupted all in person gatherings, we shifted to virtual worship and Zoom gatherings. My project shifted in approach with those whom I would interview. The people who were interviewed are leaders of Blessed Hope Baptist Church are a diverse group in tenure and talent. There are two leaders that have been members of

Blessed Hope prior to me serving as the pastor, one of them was in leadership the other was not. There are two leaders who departed from Blessed Hope after the second split in the church. They have returned under my service as pastor and were not leaders before. Finally, there are seven who have joined Blessed Hope since my assignment to serve as pastor over eight years ago, who now are in leadership. There are two leaders that I was not able to interview because of health challenges.

These eleven leaders, six sisters and five brothers, comprised the new leadership that serve with me to shepherd this new ministry of “Rise Up and Build” at Blessed Hope that has not been serving heretofore. Sisters in leadership was not an opportunity that was afforded in the previous administrations at Blessed Hope. With this collective body of servant-leaders, we are seeking to employ this Nehemiah approach of putting our hands to this good work. These leaders are a microcosm of our church demographics. We mostly have a Boomer generation of members with the median age above sixty. Our eldest member is ninety-seven; and we have a young couple with a two-year-old.

These pre-survey questions were to not assume that everyone in church had professed a belief in Christ, so I wanted to cover these questions at the beginning before the interview.

Table 2. Pain that Produces Progress pre-survey

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes
Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Have you accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of your life?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes
Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Do you believe that God loves all humanity and Jesus is the Redeemer of humanity?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes
Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Are you willing to forgive others of their offenses against you and your loved ones?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes
Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Do you believe God has forgiven you of your sins?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes



Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Will you be willing to be a restorer of others once you get into a healthy space?</b>
Member # 1	Yes
Member # 2	Yes
Member # 3	Yes
Member # 4	Yes
Member # 5	Yes
Member # 6	Yes
Member # 7	Yes
Member # 8	Yes

### **Implementation**

My hypothesis is if the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come. It is my supposition drawn from the ministry focus chapter that each of these individuals, like me has experienced some pain; but their faith has prompted them to persevere despite the pain.

The ministry work must not just include or involve prayer. Prayer must be a focal point for the progress of the ministry. Throughout 2020, but more intensely during these ninety days or so, our prayer developed and increased the faith in God for these leaders. When the pandemic halted our gatherings, we were led by God to increase our prayer time. Before the pandemic, we held corporate prayer on Wednesday mornings at 6:00 a.m. and before Bible Study in the evening hour. We began in April to join in prayer at

6:00 a.m. Monday through Friday and on Saturday at 7:00 a.m., my wife facilitates this time. Our servant-leaders and other sisters are on the Saturday prayer line. We begin praying about any and everything at the beginning of the COVID crisis, because many in the congregation were not comfortable with praying aloud; or they had not been taught to pray for themselves nor others. We searched the scriptures for different types of prayers, and we prayed them. I modeled how to pray the Word, back to God and taught them how to pray for self. This was how I have been discipling the congregation in prayer, but also training our servant leaders in facilitating prayer. I began the Monday through Friday prayer focus, but by the time of my research, the servant-leaders were facilitating the Monday through Friday prayer line. Our prayer focus would rotate around the combination of these themes: (1) salvation and spiritual maturity; (2) service and stewardship; (3) productivity and promises; (4) deliverance and development. I believe that God's restoration and transformation begins in the head and heart of the believer.

As we began this intense season of prayer, the servant-leaders began to have a different and more appreciative perspective of prayer and its value in the church. During this focused period, they began to lead prayer for the church. I have witnessed God maturing their faith and their boldness in prayer. A few of our servant leaders serve as Sunday School facilitators, their maturity in prayer was impactful in their facilitation of Sunday School lessons. Christian Education was an important component during my research period of the project, our Sunday School curriculum is from Urban Ministries International. The theme for this quarter during my research period was "Love for One Another," the thirteen lessons in this quarter were:

1. Issues of Love - Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24, 28

2. God Rewards Obedience – Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52
3. Love versus Guilt – Genesis 42:6-25
4. God’s Plan Revealed – Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15
5. Love and Devotion to Others – 1 Samuel 19:1-7
6. Love Your Enemies – Luke 6:27-36
7. Love Your Neighbor – Luke 10:25-37
8. Love Divine – 1 Corinthians 13
9. Loving by Serving – John 13:1-15, 34-35
10. Abiding Love – John 15:4-17
11. Confident Love – 1 John 3:11-24
12. Sharing Love – Acts 4:32-5:11
13. Impartial Love – James 2:1-13

These Sunday School lessons assisted in fostering the spiritual maturity and open the hearts of our members for God’s love and restorative grace. As I meet with the servant leaders after worship to discuss how they were adapting to the COVID atmosphere and how their faith was being formed and fortified during this season, it was refreshing to hear the resolve of dedication and devotion despite our current reality.

My sermons and Bible Study lesson are focused on the miracles/signs and the “I AM” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Focusing on how every time Jesus shows up, the circumstances do not just change, but are life transforming.

Table 3. Sermons and studies during the project

September 6, 2020	John 5:8-9	Rest and Restoration
September 13, 2020	John 6:5	Bread of Heaven
September 20, 2020	John 6:20	Surviving the Perfect Storm

September 27, 2020	John 9:1-5	Light that Pierces Darkness
October 4, 2020	John 11	Contrasting Conversations that Produce Courage
October 11, 2020	John 6:35, 48	An Opportunity for Overflow
October 18, 2020	John 8:12, 9:5	Light Bites
October 25, 2020	John 10:7	The Voice of The Shepherd
November 1, 2020	John 10:11,14	The Value of The Shepherd
November 8, 2020	John 11:25-26	Resurrection Faith
November 15, 2020	John 14:6	Cardiac Arrest
November 22, 2020	John 15:1	Love Connection

I would not have imagined a pandemic during my project, but God has ordained this season; and it is allowing us an intense time of introspection and invigoration for our leadership team. We all sensed God refining us and restoring us during this season. All of this led into my interviews of these servant-leaders. I was not able to interview two of the eleven because of health challenges, but the other nine provided a picture of God's restorative grace at work in them and our team.

These are the questions and the informational insight that I gained from the interviews. Member number one has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church since the founding Pastor in 1983. The questions and responses are indicated below:

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member received Christ

in the fourth grade and was led to Christ by their parents. They were raised in a Christian home and the parents modeled Christ before them.

2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood?

What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? This member's greatest memory was the togetherness in church, how times seemed joyful and pleasant with one another. There seemed to be a genuine compassion and concern for the members of the church. Their least favorable memory was when they learned about tithing, they were disappointed that they had only heard of paying dues, not tithing. They had not been exposed to the scripture regarding tithing as a child, but in adulthood they learned what the scriptures taught about tithing and have been committed ever since.

3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? No

4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? The childhood church experience was in another state where their family is from. Those relationship were with family members. Since moving to Houston, the friendship that had been formed were interrupted by the church splits. Some connections have been cordial but not the connection that once existed.

5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? The greatest moments were when the church

was operating in love and unity, on one accord, striving for the cause of Christ.

The greatest disappointments were the church splits, how angry people were and not exhibiting Christian character. The loss of the membership numbers in the church.

6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? In addition to the hurt/pain that this member had already expressed, they felt looked over and rejected growing up. This developed a resilience in them that through all the pain of life and in the church, they believed God and felt a devotion to continue to persevere despite these obstacles. They learned that God loved them despite the mistreatment they had endured.

Member number two has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church since the founding Pastor. They do not remember the year they joined.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers their childhood Pastor (Rev. W. J. Parker) and their church (Greater Mt. Olive). They grew up around a Christian family and community. Their most influential relationships were with their mother and grandmother.
2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? The greatest joy for this member was growing in the understanding of God's Word. Their view of scripture was completely transformed when they learned that the picture of Jesus in most churches did not

depict the correct portrait of Jesus according to the scriptures. Their least favorable moments of church are funerals. These were some sad moments of the Christian journey.

3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a Church regularly? No
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? Their most influential relationship that they have made in their Christian journey is with a family member that is a pastor. They have enjoyed the conversations that they have shared and the insights that they have gained.
5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? Their greatest moment in their Christian journey was when they received Christ in their life and was baptized. They knew what they were doing when they experienced baptism. The most disappointing moments were experiencing the church splits and the damage caused to the church and other relationships.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? Their deepest pain that they have experienced was the death of their father. They thought the world should have stopped at the death of their father, but it did not. In that moment, they received a wakeup call from God that they should not be idolizing anyone, even their parents. They accepted the wakeup call from God and have continued to mature since then.

Member number three joined Blessed Hope Baptist Church in 1981 but left with the second split and has returned, but their spouse still serves with the previous pastor.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers their grandmother who was a missionary being the most influential presence in their Christian journey. Their father was a minister and was very gifted, but not disciplined. Their grandmother introduced them to Jesus, and they were baptized during their high school years. They remember traveling with their grandmother to serval association meetings, being trained in Baptist Training Union and Sunday evening services.
2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? They remember that the youth met on Friday nights and how much fun they had being around their grandmother and friends at church.
3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? Yes, when they went off to college, they enjoyed life and did not attend any church until they got married. Once they got married, they settled into a church.
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? Their key relationship was with the founding pastor's wife. She reminded them of their grandmother. They got involved with



arts and crafts for Baptist Training Union and for Vacation Bible School.

Additionally, they were involved in mission, visiting nursing homes, singing, and being involved in the Christian Guild. This relationship reignited the fire of Christian service in this member life.

5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? This member's greatest moments have come under their current pastor because after leaving with the split, the traditional structure felt confining and restrictive in worship. They felt their faith was diminishing. Under the current pastor, they appreciate the Word, notes for study, and being held accountable. Their spouse supported their decision to return; but they are still under the previous pastor.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? The hurt/pain experienced in their journey was the deaths of their grandmother, their father, and their dog. Each past within three months of one another, this was a great deal of loss experienced in one year. Also, the disrespect that came with the splits, how this traumatic experience caused so much division between people who had raised their children together and had shared so many special memories and moments together. They are consoled by their favorite scriptures Psalm 27 and 91.

Member number four has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church and joined under the current pastor in 2013.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation

Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers their baptism at St. Matthew Baptist Church with Pastor Davis but was not regularly active in church growing up. They remember that their uncle was a deacon in the church where he served.

2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood?

What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? Not regularly active so they did not have many experiences to share.

3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a Church or attending a Church regularly? No

4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? As an adult, this member found a church and was shaped by Pastor Bell. Then the church called another pastor, Rev. Leonard, and the church split. The member then relocated to a Full Gospel Church and became actively involved in leadership. The church experienced a fire in the early years of 2000.

5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? The most disappointing moments for this member was coming to the realization that all good people were not in church. Their greatest moments have been at Blessed Hope where they have grown in the Word and have developed a better comprehension of God, His Church, and the Christian community of faith.

6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? The only pain shared was finding out that people are not always what they show you in church. Furthermore, people in church were just as bad, if not worst, than those outside of the church.

Member number five has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church since the founding pastor. They do not remember the year they joined.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member grew up in church, their dad was a pastor, but it was a small church. There was not much for youth to do. They were baptized in the teenage years.
2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? Their fondest memory was learning to play the piano and they played in front of the congregation for the first time before their teenage years.
3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? No
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? In college their pastor was a great influence who helped them develop in their Christian journey. Their college alumni advisor and

their high school band director all helped shape their faith and development of their musical gifts.

5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? Their greatest moments were developing a college choir ministry and the friendships that were created. At the same time, they experienced some disappointments in how to trust God and not man. They were ministering at a non-denomination church and discovered it was not authentic worship.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? Their hurt/pain in their life is the present relationship that they have with their parent. One relationship is great and the other is not so well.

Member number six has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church since the founding pastor. They left with the second spilt; and have returned under the current pastor.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers the founding pastor and was a direct benefactor of his ministry. Their Christian journey was cultivated and shaped in the ministry of Blessed Hope Baptist church.
2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? Their fondest moment was bringing the mission

lesson on a Bible Study night and surprising the founding pastor. Their least favorable moment was leaving the previous pastor and returning to Blessed Hope.

3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a Church or attending a Church regularly? No
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? They remember two sisters that shaped them. One taught them the scriptures and encouraged them to teach. The other was a good listener as they grew in the church; she gave good advice.
5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? Their greatest moment was seeing the founding pastor preach his final sermon, although he was sick in his body and frail. Their most disappointing moments dealt with the church splits and seeing their father laying out on the floor crying and praying during the first split. It happened on a Lord Supper Sunday. Then watching the toil of the splits on their parents and how their health declined.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? The hurt/pain that this member is processing is the trauma of the splits and learning to grieve the series of deaths that they have experienced in the last ten years.

Member number seven has been a member of Blessed Hope Baptist Church since 2014.

The member joined under the current pastor.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers that they were baptized at seven years old. Their great grandfather was the pastor and he passed at eighty-four-years old.
2. What do you remember about your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? They remember all the activities in the church, they were part of a church that gathered every day of the week. Monday night was designated for the Brotherhood. Wednesday night was designated for Prayer meeting. Thursday was club night with covered dishes. Friday and Saturday nights were for the youth and young adults, and then those weeklong summer revivals. Their least favorable moment is when the church split during their middle and high school years. Secondly, the least memorable event was the useless programs that the church seemed to just make up.
3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? No
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? Their key relationships were with their grandfather and two great aunts who all worked in the church. The aunts cooked, cleaned, and beautified the church. Grandfather allowed them to be present in prayer meeting and trained them to serve in the church.

5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? Their greatest moments were being allowed to assist in counting the offering and being taught leadership skills as the president of the youth group. Their most disappointing moment was when the cousin became the pastor. This was least memorable because the leadership and lifestyle was not evident to lead the church.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? The hurt/pain in their journey was going through a divorce, how they did not want it, but it was unavoidable.

Member number eight joined Blessed Hope Baptist Church under the leadership of the current pastor.

1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) This member remembers their baptism was on Easter Sunday and their pastor. They attended church regularly.
2. What do you remember your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? They remembered being involved in all church activities, learning scriptures, taking church trips, walking to church, and sometimes riding the church bus. They experienced the loss of their childhood pastor when he left the church. This was a least memorable moment. Their more memorable experiences included attending youth conferences, teaching the young adults women's class and youth classes.

3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? Yes, during a divorce for approximately two years.
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? There were many key relationships in the Sunday School department, assisting the pastor's administrative assistant, running errands for the church, and caring for the elderly.
5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? Being involved was the joy of this member. They were humbled that other members place trust in them to handle some areas of responsibility. They had several disappointing moments; a member of their former church literally slapped them in the presence of others. During their journey at this church, the pastor was called to another church. He called a meeting after church one Sunday and installed his brother as the pastor. If anyone did not like it, they had the option to leave. They were disappointed and this caused division in the church.
6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? Their hurt/pain has come from their family. Many of them have been jealous and have sowed discord in the family against them. They and their family are healing and reconciled now.

Member number nine joined Blessed Hope Baptist Church under the leadership of the current pastor.



1. What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries.) Sunday school was a major part of this members development. Their parents went to two different churches, one attended a Methodist Church, the other a COGIC Church.
2. What do you remember your church growing up as a child into adulthood? What was your fondest memory about church? What was your least memorable experience about the church? They were very appreciative of the Mothers of the church who would take the extra time to answer their questions and would encourage them to keep searching the scriptures. The least favorable experience was a fight in the Sunday School.
3. Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a church or attending a church regularly? No
4. What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth? The Mothers of the church encouraged and helped to nurture the faith of this young believer.
5. What has been your greatest moment(s) in church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in church? The greatest moments occurred when biblical insights were revealed, and God's Word became clearer along their journey. The disappointing moments were seating under pastors who seemed not to be prepared to pastor nor preach the Word of God. While living overseas not being able to find a protestant church.

6. Share your story of hurt/pain in your journey to this present time of faith in Jesus Christ? The hurt was most of the churches that they attended, they viewed as a troublemaker because they asked questions. They felt picked on, their questions were not welcomed, nor were their insights affirmed nor disciplined. This member experienced a divorce and upon their return from overseas, they spent a period of consolation at the Oasis of Love Church to heal.

*Pain that Produces Progress Post-Survey*

**MEMBER Please select how you identify?**

- # 1            Male  
                  Please select highest educational degree?  
                  High School  
                  Please select your age range?  
                  67 – up  
                  How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?  
                  1) I now have a better spiritual understanding of God's word.  
                  2) I understand the difference in being spiritual and having a relationship with God.  
                  Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build" journey?  
                  1) I've learned to have a better relationship with God.  
                  2) I have learned the importance of compassion.  
                  3) I've learned to be more committed.  
                  4) I have a better appreciation for teamwork with like-minded people working together to accomplish a goal.
- # 2            Please select how you identify?  
                  Female  
                  Please select highest educational degree?  
                  2 years college  
                  Please select your age range?  
                  67 – up  
                  How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?  
                  I have watched my spouse grow, develop, change and persevere through health

challenges and apply prayer as he watched and listened in on Zoom Bible study, church Counseling sessions. I am persuaded that this is what a divine nuclear family (as described in Genesis) would look like. I now engage in more prayer time, am more "instant and in season" when applying prayer. Sometimes I still get lazy and depend on the prayerful efforts of others. But each time I experience a refreshing and a revival as God knows what I need! I am amazed that God knows what I need. When I participate, God implements His plans. God is always at work in me. What manner of love is this? Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build Journey?"

# 3 Please select how you identify?

Female

Please select highest educational degree?

High School

Please select your age range?

54 – 66

How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?

It has helped me to have a second or third time to get it! To understand what the Lord is trying to get me to understand.

Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build" journey?

During the last three years, a more godly character has been rebuilt with in me.

I have had a journey where my faith has been tested. Holy Spirit was with me, and guided me that I needed to continue to be a child of my heavenly father.

# 4 Please select how you identify?

Female

Please select highest educational degree?

Undergrad

Please select your age range?

54 – 66

How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?

Over 100 collectively. Even amid chaos, God continues to show me his faithfulness and sustain me mentally.

Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build" journey?

Spiritual motivated to Persevere and keep Jesus Christ the focus

- # 5      Please select how you identify?  
 Female  
 Please select highest educational degree?  
 Post grad  
 Please select your age range?  
 67 - up  
 How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?  
 Have a better understanding the chapters and books of the Bible  
 Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build" journey?  
 Willing to give to help build and restore
- # 6      Please select how you identify?  
 Male  
 Please select highest educational degree?  
 High School  
 Please select your age range?  
 41 – 53  
 How Sermon Series or Bible Studies have grown you this year?  
 I would say more Bible studies, readings and prayer has contributed to my spiritual maturity. I have experienced more patience when dealing with what life throws at me. I have less panic or anxiety and have been slower to react. While reacting I have exhibiting more confidence in outcomes and more acceptance to other situations.  
 Share what has grown you the most in the last three years during "Rise Up and Build" journey?  
 I would say that the yearly 40 day fast during lent season has a way of re-orienting my passion to do what is pleasing in God's eyes at home, work, and church.

Please select how you identify?  
6 responses

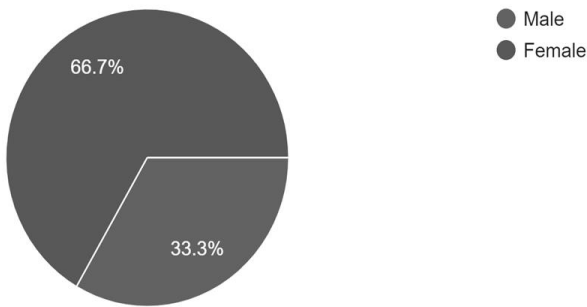


Figure 2. Participants’ gender identification

Please select highest educational degree?  
6 responses

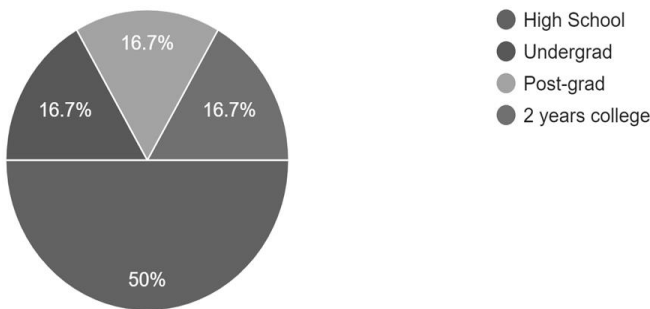


Figure 3. Participants’ highest educational degree

Please select your age range?  
6 responses

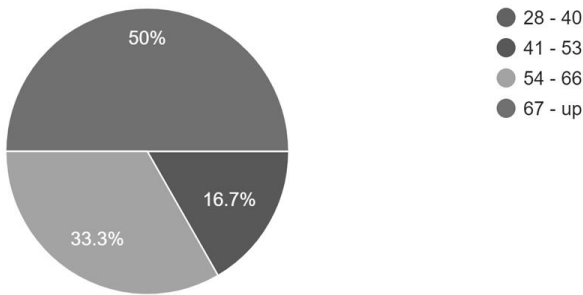


Figure 4. Participants’ age ranges

### **Summary of Learnings and Conclusion**

The data and research from this project have reinforced my focus that without God, no work is accomplished nor sustained. My context had early stability based upon the foundational leadership of the founding pastor, who led Blessed Hope faithfully for forty-six years. Based upon the turbulent times after the founding pastor, rested from his labor, the church experienced lack of leadership and infrastructure. My hypothesis is if the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions arise.

This group of members that I had planned to take through this process beginning in June of 2020, but COVID-19, impacted the forecasted plan of in-person gatherings and other group gatherings that would have been used to stimulate more dialog for these members was severely impacted by the pandemic health crisis. These members made the adjustment with me to learn technology that we were not familiar with prior to March of 2020. Our church tag line is “Ordinary People connecting to an Extraordinary God!” We see the hand of God upon us in the pandemic in various and unique ways. Learning to adapt to and use technology for all ministry offerings has been no small task, but God is faithful. Moving a non-technological congregation from in-person ministry and conference call prayer lines to Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom as the primary mediums of connection. It has been amazing.

The initial group of servant-leaders for my project was to be about twelve people, but the pandemic altered the participation through illness and work schedules, which impacted the timeline of this project. I am most appreciative of the participation that I was able to receive.

During the interviews, I discovered that each person had similar pain experiences, either death of someone close to them, divorce, church hurt during their Christian journey, and a church split. This was intriguing that God would allow these individuals from different backgrounds and parts of the surrounding Houston area to come to Blessed Hope Baptist Church. Each of the members who had no prior connection to Blessed Hope were divinely sent, because we have not done any marketing. Our church is in an obscure location in an industrialized area near a main street. They came seeking a place of refuge and a place of restoration. The members that have been at Blessed Hope for each of the four pastors have been a joy to lead and serve with; and those who left with a fraction of the former members and returned have healed and been a great help in restoration.

The infrastructure is not only systems of office management; it is connecting the individual believer into a devoted relationship with Jesus the Christ. The conviction of Nehemiah to pray even in the presence of the king has been a key element of our infrastructure. We pray often and about everything. During the intense time, I have seen these individuals' thirst after the Word of God and begin to pray with boldness. Prior to the pandemic, we might have three to five people on a prayer call once a week. We pray six days a week and average about twelve to fifteen on the call daily for at least an hour of prayer. Prayer is a major element of our infrastructure. Another essential element of our infrastructure is Bible reading and comprehension.

Our method of teaching in Bible Study on Wednesdays what was preached on Sunday, allows for reinforcement of grasping and understanding the Word of God. This method allows for the individuals who have questions about Sunday's sermon to communicate them and to get clarity. Additionally, they can share their insights and areas

of growth that is essential to spiritual maturity. This increased spiritual maturity shows in the growth of their prayer lives, because they now understand more about God and His Word, they look forward to spending time with the Lord. The last essential element has been stewardship and service. During this pandemic, our giving has decreased some, but it has been consistent. Many individuals dealing with the death of family members, some people are out of work, juggling bills, but God has been faithful. We have a drive through on the Saturday before the first Sunday for Communion pickup and our Loaves and Fish Ministry. We serve a hot meal to the members and the community and we have supported two elementary schools through our Loaves and Fish Ministry for Thanksgiving and Christmas gift cards. Our stewardship and service has been impactful during this session, I believe it begins and ends with prayer.

Nehemiah prayed and the Lord gave him favor with the king and he was granted all that he needed to restore the wall of Jerusalem. I believe God is yet able to do that for Blessed Hope, now that the infrastructure is in the church, the people, the church can begin to thrive when tragedies and transitions arise, because we are in relationship with Jesus Christ. My hypothesis is if the church develops a holistic biblical infrastructure, then the church will thrive when tragedies and transitions come. I believe we have made positive strides in proving this to be so, but we are not just building for this generation, but generations to come.



**APPENDIX A**  
**LETTER OF CONSENT**

**CONSENT FOR NEHEMIAH  
STRATEGY**

I am requesting your permission to journal and record our in person, group and/or zoom session(s) on video file(s). The purpose of this written and/or video recording is to have a record of the content presented in the sessions. The archiving of this content is for the developing Church infrastructure and strategy to create holistic restoration experiences in Blessed Hope. No recording will be done without your prior knowledge and consent. Any session containing confidential or sensitive information will not be used or archived.

By signing below, I am stating that I have read and understood the Informed Consent for Video Recording and that I am permitting \_\_\_\_\_ to journal/video record our session(s) and review the video file(s) with the aforementioned individuals for supervision purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX B**

**QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW**

**PAIN THAT PRODUCES PROGRESS****QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW**

What do you remember your childhood Christian experience? (When you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, got baptized, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Pastor, Deacons, and Missionaries)

What do you remember about your Church growing up as a child into young adulthood? What was your fondest memory about the Church? What was your least memorable experience about the Church?

Was there a period in your life where you were not connected to a Church or attending Church regularly?

What key relationships have you made in your Christian journey in the church(es) that you have been a member of? How have those relationships developed your faith or shaped your growth?

What has been your greatest moment(s) in Church? What has been the most disappointing moment(s) in Church?

Your journey here at Blessed Hope Baptist Church (1950-2020) is which:

- a) You have been a member since the founding Pastor to the current Pastor?
- b) You were a member since the founding Pastor to which successive Pastor (#2, #3, or #4)?
- c) You left with a spilt and have returned under the current Pastor?
- d) You have come from another Church and only been a member under the current Pastor?

Share your story of the hurt/pain in your journey to your present place of faith in Jesus Christ?

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